

FROM POET TO PREMIER

THE CENTENNIAL CYCLE

1809—1909

*Limited to Twelve Hundred and
Fifty Copies, of which this is
Copy Number.....*



THE CENTENNIAL CYCLE
1809—1909

POE, LINCOLN, HOLMES, DARWIN
TENNYSON, GLADSTONE

BY
THOMAS R. SLICER, M. A.

ILLUSTRATED WITH SIX ETCHINGS
BY C. X. HARRIS

LONDON • NEW YORK

MCMIX

Copyright, 1909, by
THE GROLIER SOCIETY OF LONDON

THE GROLIER SOCIETY OF LONDON
21, BEDFORD SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.1
ENGLAND

THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, CAMBRIDGE

CONTENTS

| | PAGE |
|--|------|
| PREFACE | vii |
| EDGAR ALLAN POE — The Pioneer of Roman- tic Literature in America | I |
| ABRAHAM LINCOLN — The Characteristic American | 41 |
| OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES — The Friend of the World | 81 |
| CHARLES DARWIN — The Believing Sceptic . | 115 |
| TENNYSON — The Interpreter of Legend and Life | 157 |
| GLADSTONE — The Great Commoner . . . | 193 |

PREFACE

WE have determined the conditions of fertility for the soil of the earth but have not yet been able to penetrate the designs of life which brought to birth in a single year a group of men and women who should affect the destinies of all the other millions in that year born. A twelve-months will roll by and scarcely anything will happen to the world, and then, in a single year, epochs are created and eras determined.

Such a year was 1809, in which signal events were heralded and incomparable men were born. The thunders of the Peninsular war were already terrifying Europe; the Duke of Wellington had been placed in charge of the Peninsular forces; and in that year Kinglake, the historian of the Crimea, was born to record the events of that struggle which convulsed Europe. In that same year of clamor the melodious souls of Chopin and Mendelssohn dropped upon the discords of life; Edward Fitzgerald, under some Oriental seduction

PREFACE

was tempted to earth; Goethe and Fichte were persuading the Teutonic peoples to become a united Germany. The Quarterly Review had but begun to be, seven years after the Edinburgh projectors had promised to "cultivate philosophy upon a little oatmeal," and Byron's "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" was provoked to a sprightlier criticism than was likely ever to appear in the pages which occasioned it.

While Byron's little stream of vitriol was trickling through the English mind, Coleridge's "The Friend" began its untimely life with such slack hold upon vitality that its burial occurred in 1810. The almost forgotten Anglo-Saxon Church found its competent record in the "Antiquities" of Lingard, and the first series of Maria Edgeworth's gentle comments upon "Fashionable Life" then appeared.

In this same year, and in its opening month, Edgar Allan Poe entered on the "fever called living," and, as though Nature designed a contrast, in the same year and in the same country, Oliver Wendell Holmes appeared as "the little friend of the world." Alfred Tennyson in England became the recorder of its legends and the prophet of its future greatness, whilst the sober mind of

PREFACE

Gladstone turned those legends into fact and those prophecies into history. And strangest of all, in this fertile year, on February 12, Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin saw the light, the light which from their answering eyes was reflected upon four million of slaves set free and on the tradition-bound minds of the time. The "Vestiges of Creation" were destined now to be more than a trace of life left upon our little earth, which henceforth, by Charles Darwin's leading, should be found to be the very repository of the treasures of the past. As Lincoln and Darwin, the emancipators, were born in 1809, so, in that year, the adventurous spirit of Thomas Paine struggled at last into the freedom of death.

This volume offers a brief commentary upon six of the notable births of the year. Three Americans and three Englishmen, out of the loins of our dominant Anglo-Saxon race, are here presented in their centenary: Poe, The Pioneer of Romantic Literature in America; Abraham Lincoln, The Characteristic American; Oliver Wendell Holmes, The Friend of the World; Charles Darwin, The Believing Sceptic; Alfred Tennyson, The Interpreter of Legend and Life; and William Ewart Gladstone, The Great Commoner.

PREFACE

It would be difficult to find six names, even in a decade, that should represent so wide a range of motive power in their respective fields, or of reforming energy for all time, as do the names of these six men, born in a single year, a century ago.

EDGAR ALLAN POE

EDGAR ALLAN POE

THE PIONEER OF ROMANTIC LITERATURE IN AMERICA

WE do not know what happened in the Zodiac that year of 1809, but the signs point to great fecundity of genius. Some fifteen people who have endowed the world each with his separate gift, were born into the world in that year. In considering six of these lives and their significance for the period in which they lived, I begin with Edgar Allan Poe because he began with the year. He was the child of January.

I suppose there was great excitement in the world of the elves and the fairies, and the “little people” of the underworld, when it was heard that their playmate, Elizabeth Arnold, had married, for she was herself elfin. She was the daughter of an English actress, without a country,

FROM POET TO PREMIER

being born in mid-ocean on her mother's journey to America. She looks out at us in her pictures from her little poke-bonnet, with her little ringlets and thin little arms and shallow breast like a pixey. She was a dancer and tried to be a tragedienne. After she had married a "light comedian," who was too light to stay long and was wafted away in early life, she married a second time. Her husband was the son of General Poe — that General Poe who was the friend of Lafayette and Washington — belonging to an excellent Baltimore family, who claimed to be descended from a certain Poér who belonged to Italy; they gathered their earlier artistic beauty from that country and their later quarrels from Ireland. One of these Poés (as the French still write the name) in the 18th century came to this country, and from this line Edgar Allan Poe descended.

It was a curious marriage, that of Elizabeth Arnold with Poe of Revolutionary lineage. They had no hold on life, for she was already consumptive, and he was a victim of the same disease: they had no

EDGAR ALLAN POE

fixed place in life, for they traveled from point to point to play in those difficult days, when Baltimore was a week away from Boston. It is this last fact that leads to the difficulty in fixing the place of Poe's birth, for the traveling company were continually on the move. The site has just been discovered in Boston of the house in which Poe was born; and on the same day that this was settled, some one else, a member of the family, published the statement that the house in which he was born was No. 9 Front Street, Baltimore, near the theater in which a week later his mother appeared. He came into the world a kind of elf, as difficult to place as Shelley; but Shelley soared into mid-Heaven where we could see him, and Poe crawled into subterranean ways where he easily eluded the pursuit of the curious. Two other children had been born to this elfin woman, who proved, though an inadequate artist, a veritable model for mothers. One of these children, Rosalie Poe, died in 1874; I remember her well in Baltimore as a withered old woman,

FROM POET TO PREMIER

who could never quite reconcile herself to the fame of her brother, in view of her own austere morality.

In the birth of Edgar Allan Poe, there is but one record to be made, and that is "misery." The family were poor beyond description and suffered all manner of distresses; he was the heir in his temperament of their mental equipment, but they bequeathed also a terribly restricted place in life. In Richmond when he was three years old his father and mother died; both victims of this "white plague" we are fighting now; they died practically on the floor of their lodging-rooms, covered with such thin garments as they could snatch about them in the misery and cold of death; and the two children were adopted, in the interest of their helplessness, by people in Richmond.

Poe's adoption by Mr. Allan was an adoption in good faith, but its inspiration was doubtless the utter distress of the child. Mr. Allan was a good Scotchman, and another Scotch family adopted Rosalie. Mrs. Allan, an admirable woman, hunger-

EDGAR ALLAN POE

ing for children, took the boy into her deepest affections in his childhood; but she died. The boy was uncontrollable from the beginning. Mr. Allan married again, some two or three children were born, and the rating of the adopted child fell in the market of the affections. He was doubtless a trying domestic problem. He had earlier been taken to England and had begun his education here at a public school, where he laid the foundation for a remarkable knowledge of languages. After returning to this country he prepared himself for the University of Virginia, whence he promptly secured expulsion; he then drifted to West Point, where he seems to have intentionally arranged for the discontinuance of his connection with the Academy. Then there was a rupture of the relations with his adopted family, in which Mr. Allan seems very slightly to blame. If you can imagine a very beautiful porcupine, you will have a fair idea of Poe's relation to most people. I say this not because he was himself altogether to blame, but because it was a

FROM POET TO PREMIER

fact that he had not learned that the supreme business of life is a regulation of the emotions.

When we come to the work he did in the world, we shall find that it is voluminous, but not weighty. I cannot convince myself by the most careful study that Poe was a great writer of English. I find myself in substantial agreement with Mr. Brownell in a very accurate and discerning criticism on Poe recently published. I think his criticism is just to Poe and to the facts of his life and production. Poe was inevitably a poet because he had the gift of music beyond anyone in English literature except Shelley. Every line he wrote was melodious, and he is more than what he has been called, "The Jingle Man"; he did jingle, but he was also fluent and melodious and seductive in the rhythmic utterance of an exceedingly musical mind. His poetry is all practically of one kind, and follows the law of his own making — that a poem must have unity in itself, be complete in itself, dealing with emotions which are melancholy, glorifying distress,

EDGAR ALLAN POE

and in no way admitting the exuberance and joy of life.

When you turn to his prose, you find there are two classes of his productions ; the great class, following the line of the poetry, is gruesome and means distinctly to give the impression of horror. I think I shall never be able to read often enough to grow used to it, the “ Pit and the Pendulum ” ; I can feel the slowly descending knife blade that swings above the bound body of the prisoner until one catches the swish of it through the clothing and one does not know whether he is more relieved or distressed to not find him cut in half. You follow the line of Poe’s English school days in the story of “ William Wilson,” and find in the stories of the murders of the Rue Morgue and some companion pieces the prototype of Sherlock Holmes.

“ Sherlock Holmes ” is one of the latest children of “ M. Dupin.” There were French children and other English children of M. Dupin also, but Sherlock Holmes is preëminent among them all in his resemblance. When you have stripped

FROM POET TO PREMIER

from Sherlock Holmes his cloak of mystery, there is the French detective; when you have interviewed him as to the official folly of the English police, there is Dupin laughing at the police of Paris; when you have treated him considerately in view of his omniscience, you expect him to be put in charge of the universe. So with Dupin. It is almost impossible at times to think that Conan Doyle had not Dupin in mind.

There is another class of Poe's prose that comes from the effort of analytical reasoning. He had tremendously acute powers of analysis. These were his especial pride and vanity of intellect. It does not always result in valuable criticism in dealing with authors; but when he builds up an elaborate theory—as in his last stupendous effort, his small volume which he called “Eureka,” and upon which he set a higher estimate than did the public—you realize the power of abstract reasoning that there was in him. “Eureka” is not a great “prose poem” however. Poe meant it to solve all the questions pertaining to the universe. This

EDGAR ALLAN POE

it did not do. He was too early in his science to be exact, too poetic in his imagination to be real; but it has in it great qualities of spiritual apprehension. Its spiritual impulse is the impulse of all who confront the universe with reverence, love and awe. Poe's tendency to scientific analysis appears in many of his other prose writings — in the adventures of the balloonist who goes to Mars and discovers almost as many things as Mr. Lowell describes in his recent books. His most pretentious composition in the analytical prose is the theory of the Rationale of Verse.

Let us turn for a moment to the poetry. It deals only with the gruesome, the horror-producing, the creeping appeal to your sense of aversion, and I do not wonder that Mr. Brownell, after saying that Poe's purpose was that of Dickens's "Fat Boy" "to make you creep" asks: "But what is the literary value of goose-flesh?" The great poem, perhaps, is "The Conqueror Worm." And perhaps Poe never did anything quite so well as one of the

FROM POET TO PREMIER

early boyish poems which, though so premature, marks the very height of his exquisite art,—the little poem “To Helen” which was probably written to a Helen who did not exist. He adopts it later with a certain facile assumption of interest to send to Mrs. Whitman, in the quiet city of Providence, who did exist. He saw her one night lying on the “bank of violets” at midnight, her face upturned to the moon. He sent this poem in answer to a valentine that she had sent him, and later he wrote the more pretentious tribute. This first “To Helen” however, has never been excelled in Poe’s own beautiful touch.

TO HELEN

HELEN, *thy beauty is to me*
Like those Nicean barks of yore,
That gently, o’er a perfumed sea,
The weary, wayworn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece
And the grandeur that was Rome.

EDGAR ALLAN POE

*Lo! in yon brilliant window niche,
How statue-like I see thee stand,
The agate lamp within thy hand!
Ah, Psyche, from the regions which
Are Holy Land !*

That sings itself. It does not mean anything for the most part, but this does not matter, the melody so entrances the ear. It reminds me of the story of the artist who taking up his palette set with all the colors, showed it to his friend, who said: "That is a palette set with colors"; then taking him to other side of the room, showed it to him again, and it appeared a beautiful landscape.

If you can bring yourself to the perspective of Poe's mind, you get the picture he meant to paint; there is no distinct outline, it is sometimes a splash of paint, sometimes a color scheme, but it is always art; and that must be the record of his distinction, that he was preëminently an artist who dealt in transparent and translucent color. He was the captive of melodious words; it was as natural for him to apostrophize Israfel whose "heart

FROM POET TO PREMIER

strings were a lute" as for Longfellow to speak of "Sandalphon" the angel of prayer. Sandalphon was too *useful* for Poe; Israfel's heart was like the lute strings upon which the wind blew, and he had only to expose his inward being to the woe of the world to make music—that Poe could understand and repeat.

We come now to consider Poe's ecstasy upon the discovery of Mrs. Whitman. The innocent little poem quoted above, sent in response to Mrs. Whitman's inviting valentine, might well have been left to express a playful attachment begun by moonlight, but destined to end in storm. But Poe's mind had the singular quality of autointoxication: a state of amorous excitement which seems to have been above all sensuality, an expression of delight in terms of pain. Poe and Shelley are singularly alike in this, most susceptible, most faithful, and most mercurial. If one can imagine the fluency of mercury, subject to transition from subtlety and ease of movement to steadfastness and consistency of purpose, back and

EDGAR ALLAN POE

forth in rapid transition, one would have possibly the best illustration of these two elfin natures, Shelley's, and Poe's, in which electric passion seems to give out a blinding radiance and leave no smouldering ashes. In Poe's case, perhaps, the figure fails, because the embers of one love were used to ignite the next. The fires of his affection were never extinguished; they only varied in the intensity of their flame. That he was equally faithful to Mrs. Whitman, through all the months of his adoration and rejection, did not militate against the ease with which he was able to bridge from the agony of Virginia's death to the rediscovery of his first boyish "affinity," a month or two before his own decease.

Poe had to love somebody all the time. There was no element of sensuality in his nature, so far as can be discovered; his visions were visions of pure affection; he was in love with love. Perhaps he had to have the reaction from the acerbity of his temper with men to the suavity and complete satisfaction in women; he was al-

FROM POET TO PREMIER

ways quarreling with some man and always in love with some woman. One can understand that it is the way in which a capacity for affection which is starved for human contact revenges itself upon its own delight in impossible relations, and the very dalliance of the mind is in it, without the sense of sensuality that is lower than the mind.

Among the love-letters of the world, those of Poe to Mrs. Whitman, and her replies, have been aptly compared to those classics which are associated with the names of Abelard and Heloise. The comparison seems to be not wholly true, though apt and suggestive. Love-letters that are broken sentences pinned down by exclamation points, leave too much to the imagination, and too little to literature. They remind one of those streams which in the far west make a belt of verdure where they run, and a line of desert where they disappear under ground. Even volcanic eruptions gather dignity from their flood of lava rather than from their threat of flame. There is no more intimidating

EDGAR ALLAN POE

aspect in nature than a volcano not quite extinct, and promising with every night's illumination that it is likely to become immediately active, if a little further provoked.

The charming verses entitled "Helen," which date from Poe's fourteenth year, were followed by another poem, "To Helen," when the Hellenic influence reached its height, at forty, in his acquaintance with Mrs. Whitman. While the poem "To Helen" addressed to Mrs. Whitman is characteristic of Poe, at his best, there is in it a certain artificiality and mythological illumination, which express themselves in music of a remoter and less realistic note. The poem begins:

*"I saw thee once — once only — years ago;
I must not say how many — but not many."*

These two lines are most Poesque. One can always see, in the poetry of this human "Israfel," that it begins when pain has reached its highest tension. The strings of this heart-lute never wait to respond to the touch of a hand, but are

FROM POET TO PREMIER

drawn to their utmost tension, so that they may be disturbed to splendid music *by a breath*. It is therefore quite characteristic, that Poe in addressing Mrs. Whitman, should be gently untruthful, and excuse the departure from fact by the increase of pain. His "years ago" was, as a matter of fact, only a few weeks or months at most; for the delightful agony of this acquaintance, engagement, and rejection was all comprehended within a few months of 1848 and 1849. Of course it had to be "years ago," and we must not say "how many," because that would be to tell how few—not years, but months. The poem was published in October, 1848. The moonlight, and Mrs. Whitman reposing on a bank of violets under the silvery, silken veil of light, her face upturned as were the roses to that diaphanous enfolding,—all this occurred at midnight in the previous July; and one suspects that from this poetic description of the time, Mrs. Whitman herself adopted the habit in later years of wearing a gauze covering for her face, which she continued

EDGAR ALLAN POE

through the years after Poe's death until old age, both in and out of doors; by means of which shifting veil she made a moving picture of revealed and shrouded loveliness, for the pleasure and, it must be confessed, the gentle amusement of her friends. This criticism is not meant to be unkind; indeed one is almost grateful for a vision of affection so permanent, as to be entertaining to itself even in years of disappointment and unreality.

*“ Glad all in white, upon a violet bank
I saw thee half reclining; while the moon
Fell on the upturned faces of the roses,
And on thine own, upturned — alas, in sorrow!”*

To a person of Poe's temperament this was truly a “Fateful” combination. He pauses

*“ before that garden gate,
To breathe the incense of those slumbering roses.
No footstep stirred: the hated world all slept,
Save only thee and me.”*

Such a situation, so conducive to the highest emotions, should have reconciled Poe to “the hated world”; but this also is charac-

FROM POET TO PREMIER

teristic. His most joyous emotions were never so well satisfied as when called on to adjust themselves around a grievance, “whose name is also sorrow.” Of course the whole situation, which has been described in terms of mist, moonlight, and music, must at this point disappear:

“ *Ah, bear in mind, this garden was enchanted.
The pearly luster of the moon went out:
The mossy banks and the meandering paths,
The happy flowers and the repining trees,
Were seen no more: the very roses’ odors
Died in the arms of the adoring airs.
All—all expired save thou — save less than thou—
Save only the divine light in thine eyes —
Save but the soul in thine uplifted eyes.
I saw but them — they were the world to me.
I saw but them — saw only them for hours —
Saw only them until the moon went down.*”

To a truly adventurous spirit, the going down of the moon ought to have been the invitation to pass within the gate; but it was characteristic of Poe, that a gentlemanly restraint accompanied his most volcanic moments. Never in history has there been an eruption of feeling combined

EDGAR ALLAN POE

so completely with perfect decorum of manner. It is to the everlasting credit of Edgar Allan Poe that the audacities of his mind, which were often eccentricities of emotion, were always sustained by this perfect decorum of behavior. This poem should end with the line

“How fathomless a capacity for love!”

His self-torture breaks down however at this point in terms of mythology; the moon becomes “dear Dian”:

*“dear Dian sank from sight,
And thou [that is Helen], a ghost, amid the entombing
trees
Didst glide away.”*

Of course one discovers at once that the hide and seek, played by Selené and Endymion among the tombs, is in Poe's mind.

I have subjected this poem to some dismemberment because its artificiality forbids the idea that dismemberment in its case brings the pain of dislocation. For instance, in this dim garden scene, Poe discovers that

FROM POET TO PREMIER

“ Only thine eyes remained.
They would not go ; they never yet have gone.
Lighting my lonely pathway home that night,
They have not left me (as my hopes have) since.
They follow me — they lead me through the years.
They are my ministers — yet I their slave.
Their office is to illumine and enkindle —
My duty to be saved by their bright light,
And purified in their electric fire,
And sanctified in their Elysian fire.
They fill my soul with Beauty (which is hope)
And are far up in heaven — . . .
In the sad, silent watches of my night ;
While even in the meridian glare of day
I see them still, two sweetly scintillant
Venuses, unextinguished by the sun ! ”

The most uncritical observation would show that all that is in these sixteen lines must be summed up in the phrase “only thine eyes remained.” The rest is confusing. Mrs. Whitman as a matter of fact had very fine eyes. Poe saw them last suffused with tears as he departed from the Whitman home under the disapproval of her family. These eyes were the two “sweetly scintillant” orbs by the light of which he penned two letters, one to

EDGAR ALLAN POE

“Helen” and the other to “Annie” in almost identical phrase, and at an interval too brief for complete recovery, expressing the deepest affection in terms of mingled despair and delight. Truly this was a kaleidoscopic nature! Every revolution of the instrument made a new figure, composed of particles so brilliant that beauty was insured, though under aspects often futile and unmeaning.

Take the poem he called “Ulalume,” in which I myself can discover no meaning except to make ready for the pronunciation of a liquid word. The word took hold on Poe’s mind and he made it the culmination of the poem to which he gives that title. I think I do not exaggerate when I say there is no idea in this poem, that no line of it means definitely anything: it is a picture but not a picture of anything; it is a melody without a theme, a succession of liquid intonations that do not form anything but words.

FROM POET TO PREMIER

ULALUME

THE *skies they were ashen and sober ;*
 The leaves they were crispèd and sere —
 The leaves they were withering and sere ;
It was night in the lonesome October
 Of my most immemorial year ;
It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,
 In the misty mid region of Weir —
It was down by the dank tarn of Auber,
 In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

Here once, through an alley Titanic,
 Of cypress, I roamed with my Soul —
 Of cypress, with Psyche, my Soul.
These were days when my heart was volcanic
 As the scoriac rivers that roll —
 As the lavas that restlessly roll
Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek
 In the ultimate climes of the pole —
That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek
 In the realms of the boreal pole.

Our talk had been serious and sober,
 But our thoughts they were palsied and sere —
 Our memories were treacherous and sere —
For we knew not the month was October,
And we marked not the night of the year —
 (Ah, night of all nights in the year!);

EDGAR ALLAN POE

*We noted not the dim lake of Auber
(Though once we had journeyed down here)—
Remembered not the dank tarn of Auber,
Nor the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.*

*And now as the night was senescent
And star-dials pointed to morn —
As the star-dials hinted of morn —
At the end of our path a liquescent
And nebulous lustre was born,
Out of which a miraculous crescent
Arose with a duplicate horn —
Astarte's bediamonded crescent
Distinct with its duplicate horn.*

*And I said — “ She is warmer than Dian :
She rolls through an ether of sighs —
She revels in a region of sighs ;
She has seen that the tears are not dry on
These cheeks, where the worm never dies,
And has come past the stars of the Lion
To point us the path of the skies,
To the Lethean peace of the skies —
Come up, in despite of the Lion,
To shine on us with her bright eyes —
Come up through the lair of the Lion,
With love in her luminous eyes.”*

*But Psyche, uplifting her finger,
Said — “ Sadly this star I mistrust—
Her pallor I strangely mistrust : —*

FROM POET TO PREMIER

Oh, hasten! — oh, let us not linger!
Oh, fly! — let us fly! — for we must.”
In terror she spoke, letting sink her
Wings until they trailed in the dust
In agony sobbed, letting sink her
Plumes till they trailed in the dust,
Till they sorrowfully trailed in the dust.

I replied: “ This is nothing but dreaming ;
Let us on by this tremulous light !
Let us bathe in this crystalline light !
Its Sibyllic splendor is beaming
With Hope and in Beauty to-night : —
See ! — it flickers up the sky through the night !
Ah, we safely may trust to its gleaming,
And be sure it will lead us aright —
We safely may trust to a gleaming
That cannot but guide us aright,
Since it flickers up to Heaven through the night.”

Thus I pacified Psyche and kissed her,
And tempted her out of her gloom —
And conquered her scruples and gloom ;
And we passed to the end of a vista,
But were stopped by the door of a tomb —
By the door of a legended tomb ;
And I said — “ What is written, sweet sister,
On the door of this legended tomb ? ”
She replied — “ Ulalume — Ulalume —
’T is the vault of thy lost Ulalume ! ”

EDGAR ALLAN POE

*Then my heart it grew ashen and sober
As the leaves that were crispèd and sere —
As the leaves that were withering and sere ;
And I cried — “ It was surely October
On this very night of last year
That I journeyed — I journeyed down here —
That I brought a dread burden down here !
On this night of all nights in the year,
Ah, what demon has tempted me here ?
Well I know, now, this dim lake of Auber —
This misty mid region of Weir —
Well I know, now, this dank tarn of Auber, —
This ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.”*

We would not have this poem changed, but it is a fact that the world could have done without it, because it does not convey anything but an expression of misery in terms of beauty. That indeed was Poe's mission in poetry. Perhaps the pure delight in misery, the splash of color for decoration, and the sense for music in mellifluous words have no finer illustration in all of Poe's poetry than that which we find in the poem, “Ulalume.” Whatever may have been the compelling impulse under which this poem was composed, more than almost any other it gives evi-

FROM POET TO PREMIER

dence of *composition* rather than spontaneity. The stage is carefully set, and “the cypresses” are planted in order. They are “gigantic,” and therefore insure gloom in forming a vista at the end of which shall appear the “door of a legended tomb”; and the form of the poem by its reiterated nouns and varied adjectives—

“ *The leaves they were crispèd and sere,
The leaves they were withering and sere —* ”

has a more studied aspect than any personal experience of distress would normally afford. The imagery is almost as gruesome as that which was traversed by Browning's young squire in the search for the “Dark Tower.” We have elements of horror in terms of location, for which the only adjective that could truly be used would be the adjective leprous. We have the “dim lake of Auber,” the “dank tarn of Auber,” and “ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.” The volcanic condition of the poet's heart is compared to the “sulphurous currents down Yaanek,”

EDGAR ALLAN POE

which seem, contrary to the habit of seismic disturbances, to be situated in the “ultimate climes of the pole.” Nature’s orchestra, in all its most base-viol-and-drum effects, seems to have lacked rehearsal; for we note the groan, as though sulphurous currents rolled down Mount Yaanek “In the realms of the boreal pole,” while immediately following the diapason of nature’s organ, the flutes and violins furnish an accompaniment for such lines as

*“And now as the night was senescent
And star-dials pointed to morn —
As the star-dials hinted of morn —
At the end of our path a liquescent
And nebulous lustre was born,
Out of which a miraculous crescent
Arose with a duplicate horn
Astarte’s bediamonded crescent
Distinct with its duplicate horn.”*

This orchestral effect leads up to the duet between Psyche, presumably an external Psyche, and the poet himself. The whole theme is musical. Psyche is a timid angel

FROM POET TO PREMIER

*“ letting sink her
Wings until they trail in the dust —
 . . . letting sink her
Plumes till they trail in the dust —
Till they sorrowfully trail in the dust.”*

However profound Psyche's sorrow or engrossing her terror may be, her sobs are still musical and her tremors are rhythmic. And these musical fears lean well upon the robust notes of her companion, until the inscription upon the “legended tomb” has been deciphered; and then the irresistible, mellifluous notes for which the whole musical theme has been preparing, are uttered in the lines:

*“ And I said — ‘ What is written, sweet sister,
 On the door of this legended tomb ?’
She replied, ‘ Ulalume — Ulalume —
 ’Tis the vault of thy lost Ulalume !’ ”*

Here the poem should have ended. This is a masterful climax. Hence the concluding stanza has all the artificiality which attends upon the actor who has just died, but who rises to respond to the applause of his audience, a living demonstration of a sustained agony:

EDGAR ALLAN POE

*“ Then my heart it grew ashen and sober
As the leaves that were crispèd and sere.”*

Whereupon the poet, with a rationality that is quite exceptional, defines the time of year, telling us that from October to October, his “most immemorial year,” had prepared for the present catastrophe; describes a processional visit, now remembered for the first time, and ends the poem with a geographical adjustment of “Auber” and “Weir” which leaves us still uncertain as to any use they have served except as a gloomy background for a rather indefinite tragedy. It seems not a bold venture to say that if this poem has any meaning, it means too much; and in the absence of any date which would indicate that it is a personal experience, the critic is driven to the conclusion that it is a carefully provided and procured delirium. That it is musical beyond comparison cannot be denied, but it is the music of a harp which has fallen to the earth, and gives out a bruised confusion of sweet sounds, because the disaster is to an instrument strung for melody. But between a musical

FROM POET TO PREMIER

accident and a celestial concord, there is the remoteness of the heavens from the earth!

As to Poe's character, there is at last no division of opinion. There never would have been anything but pity and consideration and admiration, but for Griswold's interference. There are two characters to be abhorred in literature, neither of them literary. One is Trelawney, who uncovered Byron's lame feet after death to satisfy his own morbid curiosity; and the other is this sanctimonious Griswold, who gave to Poe for years a posthumous infamy, and told of him all he could imagine; grouping all his defects into one paragraph, charging all his delinquencies to one day, and massing his infirmities until one would wonder, if these things were so, that he could have lived to his fortieth year.

The facts as to Poe's life are these: he was an inebriate, he did use drugs; his mind was of that character that gathers its best capacity under stimulant; but it is singular that those who knew him best and saw him oftenest are not those who

condemn him most freely. As nearly as can be determined Poe was a person of low vitality, of delicate health, of nervous derangement—a neurotic. He had come into the world half made up, was the care of strangers from his birth; came from a dancing mother and a reel-playing father, both of them of infirm health. He had no control or direction; he had never learned that the “emotions are the masters and the intellect the servant” in this world of mind. Those words had not then been written of Herbert Spencer. When he was gloomiest, he lifted himself out by drink; when he was dull, he stimulated himself by drugs; but it is said that he had a singular capacity for drink and gentlemanliness together. That is not an excuse for the one, but it is a thing we must remember concerning the other. I think he drank mostly alone—heart-cold and forlorn, when he was at zero. Hear what he says himself in a letter in respect to this. It is in the Ingram correspondence. It is dated the year after his child-wife died, the year before he died himself. He was liv-

FROM POET TO PREMIER

ing at Fordham, where his cottage still stands, rescued from destruction first by the good offices of the New York Shakespeare Society. He had married that wife most abnormally when she was twelve or fourteen, with the entire consent of her mother and the lying assistance of a friend, who for the purposes of the marriage represented her age as twenty-one. He was true to her beyond all question, and tender to her almost beyond comparison. Why he should have felt that the proximity of living with his aunt, Mrs. Clemm, necessitated marriage with this child is beyond scientific or emotional explanation, but at any rate they were married. She must have been very attractive, although the only likeness that is left is a very repulsive one, taken from a miniature painted by what would seem to have been an epileptic artist. She is on all hands, however, described as wondrously beautiful. He writes the following letter to Thomas Dunne English:

“ Six years ago a wife whom I loved as no man ever loved before, ruptured a blood vessel in sing-

EDGAR ALLAN POE

ing. Her life was despaired of. I took leave of her forever and underwent all the agonies of her death. She recovered partially, and I again hoped. At the end of a year the vessel broke again. I went through precisely the same scene, . . . then again — again — and even once again, at varying intervals. Each time I felt all the agonies of her death — at each accession of the disorder I loved her more dearly and clung to her life with more desperate pertinacity. But I am constitutionally sensitive — nervous in a very unusual degree. I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity. During these fits of absolute unconsciousness, I drank — God only knows how often or how much. As a matter of course my enemies referred the insanity to the drink, rather than the drink to the insanity. I had indeed nearly abandoned all hope of permanent cure when I found one in the death of my wife. This I can and do endure as becomes a man. It was the horrible never-ending oscillation between hope and despair which I could not longer have endured without total loss of reason. In the death of what was my life, then, I received a new, but — O God — how melancholy an existence.”

All the poverty and gloom of his life had been penetrated by the sunlight of this girl's presence. She and her mother and he formed at Fordham a family of sacra-

FROM POET TO PREMIER

mental devotion. They were poor to beggary. He wrote for the *Broadway Journal* as he had written for the *Richmond Literary Messenger*; but the things he wrote, though they were immediately in vogue, scarcely brought in any return. I recall a contribution of his to Lowell's *The Pioneer*, which brought him ten dollars. He brought up the circulation of the *Broadway Journal* from four thousand to fifty thousand, yet suffered from poverty that was abject, so that Mrs. Clemm tells of having to borrow a shilling to get a letter from the mail. The little wife was found by friends who had heard of their poverty, in the agonies of death, covered only by an overcoat, while her mother chafed her feet and Poe desolately held her hands.

And then — you say — he immediately falls in love with Helen Whitman. Well, he had to be in love all the time, as I have said. It was necessary for his existence. It is difficult — a nature like Poe's. I am not extenuating his faults, but there is no doubt that he was not a vulgar drunkard; and if he had been more to blame than he

EDGAR ALLAN POE

was, Griswold might have made better terms with the recording angel than by publishing it. His is a melancholy case of living in an unreal world. He saw not actual things but the ghosts of things; the emotions he suffered were emotions of disorder and pain. He was in a world of astonishing distortions of common thought.

When he came to die it was after he had been driven from Mrs. Whitman's home in Providence. He had found an old friend in Virginia to whom he became engaged and meanwhile was corresponding in terms of exalted affection with another woman in Massachusetts, whom he addresses as "Annie." He was at this time the center of an affection on all sides that sought to save him in terms of admiration and tenderness. The critics were reasoning at him; the women he knew were seeking to love him out of his travail. He had reached Baltimore, practically deranged and without physical strength, just at the time of an election. That was the period from '49 to '55 of brutal American loyalty to what were not America's ideas;

FROM POET TO PREMIER

the elections of that period were tragedy, times of assassination and terror. The city of Baltimore on election day was given over to mob rule; schools were closed and club fought with club for the repeaters who were a rating asset for either side for pay. Poe seems to have been taken in charge by some ruffians and either drugged or intoxicated; the physician who was later called stated that he found in him no signs of liquor but of drugs. He was found at night, a physician was called, and he was taken to the Infirmary where he died. That he died from the effects of a drunken spree, as has been intimated, seems absolutely untrue. I speak of this only with the desire to at least rescue a little holy memory for Poe.

Poe was the pioneer of the romantic features of American literature. He was the progenitor of a certain school of literature in France; Baudelaire, Verlaine, and their associates might almost be called the decadents of literature and of Poe, because their decline into sensualism is a decline from the purer empyrean of Poe's un-

EDGAR ALLAN POE

tarnished enthusiasm for the spiritual, in terms of the sensuous not of the sensual. Poe thought in terms of beauty and loveliness, never of lust and baseness. There is not one line of this to match a thousand lines of Byron along the lower levels of the imagination. He was not a *great* writer because he was an abnormal mind; and only a normal mind can lift the emotions to the level of the genius that has domain over any nature.

We can all remember how we raved with the "Raven" and listened for the change in the tone of the "Bells"; we are still tinkling with the bells that come to their final sob, for they must sob in the end however they tinkle in the beginning; we still sit in the shadow of the "Raven" on the bust of Pallas. Even though it be not a great poem, it is probably Poe's best. After all that has been said, we feel that Poe was one of God's harps that was out of tune, or if it was in tune for melody's sake, was played by the hand of the insane. Poe opened a door into the mysteries of disorder, but had not learned

FROM POET TO PREMIER

“the laws of disorder or the moral of accidents.” He was in a world, to his mind, sadly out of joint, because he himself was ill-adjusted to it. He was like a sigh that lingers on the air, and finally expires in a sob. No more pitiful figure appears in literature, and none so mad to be pitied. His trembling hands reach for comfort in vain. He recited his mistakes concerning life in terms of beauty. He was a *martyr by mistake*.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN



W. H. HARRIS, SC.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THE CHARACTERISTIC AMERICAN

IF the casual observer had been asked what happened in the year 1809 that was of most importance, probably he would have said it was the placing of Wellington in charge of the troops of the Peninsula, the opening act in that great drama in which Napoleon and Wellington were to try issues, the final act of which should be the overthrow of Napoleon at Waterloo. Probably, as next in importance, would have been mentioned the fact that Madison had been inaugurated President of the United States, the Republic that was young enough in 1809 to be regarded still by European powers as an experiment. But, in fact, that year saw far more important events than either of these; for, in 1809 Charles Darwin was born; in 1809 William Ewart Gladstone was born; and in 1809 came to birth Abraham Lincoln, who has well been called “The

FROM POET TO PREMIER

first American." He was "The first American"; but not because of the fact that the soil had produced no other who could be truly called American; for in this land we are able to bring into being by birth, by importation, and by training, Americans of the first quality. Some are born of our loins; some are borne into our number from other lands, where Americanism is nascent, but has not had proper scope for development; and others come to Americanism by the inoculation of our ideals and the splendid influence of our institutions. That most real American, Edward Everett Hale, has described our system of public schools as the "stomach of the Nation which digests everything which is put into it!"

Abraham Lincoln was born in 1809. He seemed to have been dug out of the soil. Washington was an English gentleman: he was none the less the great motive-power in the founding of the Republic. But Lincoln was "Tom Lincoln's boy": that was the way he was known in Kentucky and Indiana and Illinois, in the

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

successive stages in which Thomas Lincoln, his father, with a shiftlessness that was only equaled by his enterprise, moved from one state to another. He had taken up land first in Indiana and then in Illinois, his ancestors coming from Virginia to Kentucky; and he seems to have had two signal qualities. The first was the power to be in perpetual motion. How many crops he planted and gathered on any one of the farms that he owned is not recorded. In the first place the forest must be subdued, the farm had to be cultivated so that a crop might be planted, and that, to an easy-going man is hard work;—to cut down the timber, break up the land, harrow it and get it ready for the seed. This was not according to Tom Lincoln's idea of life. He was called a carpenter and a joiner. What carpentry he did I do not know—he might have been well called a “journey-man workman”; but he “joined” the fellows at the cross-roads store with great regularity. He was immensely popular among his rude companions. He was a story teller; from

FROM POET TO PREMIER

him Abraham Lincoln evidently gained that facility for telling the right story at the right time. His wife was Nancy Hanks. It is difficult to tell just why a race horse should have been called after her, for she was a most quiet person; but she had to trot with an unwilling mate, and brought him up to his paces and made him pull his share of the load. But Nancy Hanks was a gentle soul, and died early, making the great removal when her son was not more than ten years of age.

Tom Lincoln seems to have been an attractive person. It is curious that a man so shiftless should have been so popular. He had ease of motion and people liked to watch him go. He had a certain facility in moving from farm to farm, from neighborhood to neighborhood. After Nancy died he went back to Kentucky, the State from which he had originally come, and there found an old sweetheart whom he married. She was as thrifty as he was shiftless and it is probable that she was able to keep him

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

up to his work. The house to which Tom Lincoln brought his second wife had only three sides enclosed; the fourth was open to the view. It was a mere lean-to, a temporary structure, almost primeval.

Out of the soil Lincoln grew.

LINCOLN

THE MAN OF THE PEOPLE

WHEN *the Norn Mother saw the Whirlwind Hour*
Greatening and darkening as it hurried on,
She left the Heaven of Heroes and came down
To make a man to meet the mortal need.
She took the tried clay of the common road—
Clay warm yet with the ancient heat of Earth,
Dashed through it all a strain of prophecy;
Tempered the heap with thrill of human tears;
Then mixed a laughter with the serious stuff.
Into the shape she breathed a flame to light
That tender, tragic, ever-changing face.
Here was a man to hold against the world,
A man to match the mountains and the sea.

The color of the ground was in him, the red earth;
The smack and tang of elemental things:
The rectitude and patience of the cliff;
The good-will of the rain that falls for all;

FROM POET TO PREMIER

*The friendly welcome of the wayside well ;
The courage of the bird that dares the sea ;
The gladness of the wind that shakes the corn ;
The mercy of the snow that hides all scars ;
The secrecy of streams that make their way
Beneath the mountain to the rifted rock ;
The undelaying justice of the light
That gives as freely to the shrinking flower
As to the great oak flaring to the wind—
To the grave's low hill as to the Matterhorn
That shoulders out the sky.*

*Sprung from the West,
The strength of virgin forests braced his mind,
The hush of spacious prairies stilled his soul.
Up from log cabin to the Capitol,
One fire was on his spirit, one resolve—
To send the keen axe to the root of wrong,
Clearing a free way for the feet of God.
And evermore he burned to do his deed
With the fine stroke and gesture of a king :
He built the rail-pile as he built the State,
Pouring his splendid strength through every blow
The conscience of him testing every stroke,
To make his deed the measure of a man.*

*So came the Captain with the thinking heart ;
And when the judgment thunders split the house,
Wrenching the rafters from their ancient rest,
He held the ridgepole up, and spiked again*

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

*The rafters of the Home. He held his place —
Held the long purpose like a growing tree —
Held on through blame and faltered not at praise.
And when he fell in whirlwind, he went down
As when a lordly cedar, green with boughs,
Goes down with a great shout upon the hills,
And leaves a lonesome place against the sky.¹*

Such a boy, so born, on the frontiers of comfort would have scant training. He was scarcely “self-made”; he was created by a brooding Heaven from the patient simplicities of time and ever waiting earth — waiting for the “downfall from on High.” He did not boast as is the habit now that he had been poor; his retrospect was with eyes sad with regret, but his mouth was too firm for the tremulous appeal of self-pity. When asked for some account of his early training, he said, “Education defective” and so it was entered on the Congressional Record in 1848. As a matter of truth all his schooling was covered by a calendar year.

When he was asked later if he could

¹ “Lincoln: the Man of the People,” by Edwin Markham: published by permission of the author.

FROM POET TO PREMIER

write, he said, "Yes I can make a few rat tracks." He really wrote a very good hand. If you will look at the facsimile of the Gettysburg address, you will find that he wrote a clear, exact, and legible hand. He was one of the people who took education very easily. His whole adjustment to life was that of a man who sits easy to the saddle, who does not ride as an Englishman rides, with his knees cocked up and his toes turned out and pig-skin under him, so that he strikes it with greatest promptness at every rise and fall. Lincoln had the "seat" of the plainsman who goes with the horse. He found it easy to gain knowledge. His college was the country store; his grammar school was the farm. He worked when he had work to do, and when there was none, he did not fret. Life was simple in those early days. He did not need much. Life is always simple in its elements and complex in its development. It is said that after he began to study law he was found one day, by an old man who lived in his neighborhood, on the wood-

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

pile with his book on his knees
gaunt figure, now sixteen or so
years of age, long and lank and bony,
with no shoes and homespun trousers and
coat, his face already bearing the hag-
gard look that followed him through life.
This old neighbor said, "What you doin',
—readin'?" "No," was the answer, "I
am not reading; I'm studying." He had
made that distinction already. There is
a difference between having things run
through the mind as through a sieve and
having them stick like a bur. So Lincoln
said, "I am not reading; I'm studying."
"Well," said the old man, "what are you
studyin'?" "Law," was the reply. It
is recorded that the old man looked at
him a moment, and said, "Great Gord
A'mighty!" I suppose the contrast be-
tween the word "law," and such a dis-
orderly person as Lincoln presented on
top of the wood-pile, made the old man
think that nobody but the Divine Being
could bring law and disorder together.
Recall how he looked, — long, bony, six
feet four inches tall; how he seemed to

FROM POET TO PREMIER

men flung together in some cata-
strophe of Nature; how brooding his face
when it was, and how it lit up with the lamp
of his keen intelligence, and how usually
at such a time some humorous suggestion
fell from him. Every contemporary who
speaks of his expression pauses to note
the compelling beauty of his eyes—twin
lights in the gloom of a saddened mind!

But we come to the ruling principles of
his mind, and they showed early in his
life. This early reputation was not that
of a thinker but of a man of action, slow
to be roused but invincible. He was a
great wrestler. He was put against any-
body who came along, and he always
played fair. When on one occasion he
seemed to have done some injustice to one
of his fellows who challenged him to fight,
he said that his step-brother was about the
size of this man, and he thought he would
look on while his step-brother took his
part. He never failed to match his
strength against great odds, but he re-
fused to use his strength brutally.

These things were all a part of his life.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

If he worked, he worked ; if he played, he played. He began the study of law by making a discovery. He discovered it at the bottom of a barrel. When Lincoln was keeping a country store, a man drove up who was moving with his household effects, and asked Lincoln if he would not take out of his wagon a barrel of stuff that was very much in his way, odds and ends which probably represented the last hour's packing. Lincoln paid half a dollar for the barrel, put it in the cellar and there it stayed for months. It finally got in the way, was taken out, and at the bottom of the barrel was found a volume of Blackstone's Commentaries. Lincoln seized upon it and devoured it. Then he went to work in a law office at Springfield, and at the age of twenty-three he made his first appeal to his constituents for election.

Lincoln was living at this time in a little place called Gentryville. Colonel Robert Ingersoll used to tell about a man he knew who frequently said to the men gathered at the village store, "Boys, I have more brains than any of you, but I live at Pinck-

FROM POET TO PREMIER

neyville, and what can you ever expect of a man who hails from Pinckneyville?" So one would think that Lincoln would have revolted from living in a place called Gentryville; but he made it respectable; he made it a place where a real man might be found.

At twenty-three we find him appealing in a curious circular to the voters of his section for election to the Assembly. He tells what he believes about the improvement of the roads. He was the kind of politician who does not begin by feeling that he is born to be President. Lincoln made his appeal on the ground of what ought to be done for the improvement of the roads; he was dealing with the local situation. In other words his idea of politics was that the duty of a citizen is in the place where he is. After telling what he thinks about these things, he says at the end of the circular, which was singularly frank—written by this man scarcely out of his boyhood—"Now, I have told you very frankly what I think about all these things; but it is better to be right part of

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

the time, and if I find that I am wrong about any of these things I shall be glad to be corrected."

Lincoln was always ready to be informed. When one of the members of the cabinet had said that he was a fool—with an adjective to emphasize the foolishness, Lincoln said, "Well, he is generally right! If he said I was that kind of a fool I think probably I am. I will go over and see him about it." He was a man with a humble estimate of himself. He was not cocksure of his opinion, but absolutely sure of his direction. That is a dominant principle in the life of Abraham Lincoln,—not to be sure of speculative thinking, but to be sure of principles of action. That exactly states the difference between the man whose head is in a whirl and the man whose heart is sound at the center. He has no right either by his training or antecedents or experience of life to feel that he is intellectually sure of any thing about which he could not be changed as to his opinion. But the man does not live who is so poor, so limited in his observation,

FROM POET TO PREMIER

or defective in his training and education, that he may not know from top to bottom the cleavage between right and wrong and determine at once the thing he wants to hold to with all his might.

Lincoln's distinction is that his ethical directness, his moral certainty was like the rifle, the trajectory of which is so direct that you do not have to allow for the parabola that the bullet is to describe before it lodges ; his mind fired point-blank. This moral projection is a distinct quality in this open-minded man. For instance, after he became a member of Congress, in the very first session after he was elected to the House of Representatives, Mr. Polk sent a message to Congress declaring that the Mexican War had been brought on by the invasion of American territory and the shedding of the blood of American citizens. Lincoln, young, uncouth, the object of everybody's observation, the cause of derision by some who saw only his awkward exterior, offered a resolution in Congress asking the President to define the exact spot on which the blood was shed. There

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

was no such spot. Lincoln had that clever way of saying he thought Mr. Polk romancing. It is not nice to call the President a liar; is not well to abuse the Executive on lines of personal difference; but where a Presidential message assumes a condition that does not exist, it is very well to have the place pointed out in which the condition is said to have occurred; and the resolution of Mr. Lincoln, this beginner in the Congressional debate, which was never passed nor acted upon, went far to convey the idea that here was a man with whom one could not juggle. This followed him all through life. The impression was made by his attitude and deliverance that he never fooled with himself, that he never juggled with his own moral sense, that he knew that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points! He had but small use for expediency. He was not, however, impatient of compromise — when the absolute met the impossible! I do not know how he would have fared with European diplomacy in some of the aspects which it used to have in its earlier period,

FROM POET TO PREMIER

its fundamental axiom being that you told the truth to the man who was entitled to hear it. But certainly his dealing with diplomacy, as it came into his observation, followed exactly his dealing in the wrestling match.

When the American sloop of war took Mason and Slidell from the deck of the English steamer, Mr. Lincoln said at once that he believed it was an unjust act upon our part, and that he expected England would require restitution, which England did; and Lincoln promptly surrendered Mason and Slidell and apologized to England on the ground that this "was what the war of 1812 was about," and we had attacked England for the very course which we had followed in taking these men from the English steamer. And the English people understood from that time, however sentimental they might be about the cause of slavery and the cause of the Southern Confederacy, that here was a man who, when he knew a thing was wrong, would confess it and make the restitution required.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

There was a certain chivalry in this humble man that is seen in his first love-affair that left its impress upon his life. The death of this young girl seems to have shadowed his whole life and threatened for a while to drive him into melancholy. Still there was a humorous side to his chivalry; as, for instance, when in his store some man was vulgarly profane in the presence of a woman, Lincoln left his customers and rubbed smartweed into the man's eyes. This way to provoke the signs of repentance may not be the way to produce a clean heart; but it compels all the outward signs of being very sorry.

Anyone who observed Mr. Lincoln during the time of his Presidency observed the curious alternation of sadness and merriment. If you compare the two life-masks, one taken just before Lincoln's nomination for the Presidency, and the other just before his death, you will see the history of the struggle of the Civil War in the face. The first is virile, direct and vital, it has the look of a man who is going to lead in a great contention; the

FROM POET TO PREMIER

second is the worn face of an old man who had dropped to the inevitable and rests on it with some degree of peace but is prone under the struggle. The chariots of conflict had rolled over his brow, but no dust of battle had dimmed his eyes. There was cause enough for the contrast those two life-masks present in the great load that he carried; in the fact that he was confronting a situation entirely new, without precedents upon which to act; with a divided North upon which he must lean for support, with no doubt in his own mind that the cause of slavery was wrapped up in the cause of secession; confronting the Constitutional lawyers who argued that the Southern States had a right to secede,—a contention which began in 1842 when Adams presented a petition from Holyoke for the dissolution of the Union and an attempt was made to impeach him for suggesting that the Union could be dissolved. This is a singular and very little noted fact of the history of that period before the war.

Mr. Lincoln, like Webster, believed there

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

are some things that you have a constitutional right to do that it is suicide to allow you to do ; and so he set himself upon the proposition that the States, though they could move out of the Union, could never do so by consent of all the States involved. That is sound doctrine now, whatever it might have been in the beginning of 1860, when even General Scott said “we had better let them go.” Wendell Phillips, intent on the abolition of slavery, still had grave doubts whether the Southern States could be held, and asked who this uncouth and singular creature was who had come from the West to take the reins of government. That is the difference between Wendell Phillips and Abraham Lincoln. No detraction from Mr. Phillips need be made, but there were times when a certain sharpness and severity as to the cause for which he contended was carried over to the objects associated with the opposition he encountered, the persons in the contention.

I remember that the Sage Old Man of Concord, after he had been roundly abused

FROM POET TO PREMIER

by Mr. Phillips, being in the street in Boston on the day Wendell Phillips was buried, was asked by a friend if he was going to Mr. Phillips's funeral, and said, "No ; but I approve of it." It was that aspect of Phillips's mind that led him to call in question whether a man strung together like Abraham Lincoln, with no shadow, nor illumination, of Harvard College upon his path, with none of the conditions of the antislavery struggle in his antecedents, — whether that man really had grasped the principles of action by which that problem was to be solved and the great conundrum worked out.

Lincoln held on his way. He had that curious faculty of holding off until it was time to hold on, and then it was as though over his hands were laid the strong hands of Omnipotence. During all the time between his election and the 4th of March, when his inauguration occurred, people wondered why he did not declare himself as to the principles involved. The States were beginning to secede. Mr. Lincoln said, "There is no way, but that when

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

this matter comes to the issue, slavery must be taken out of the national life." But he would not utter one word severe and condemnatory of those people who were in a state of revolt already. In his inaugural he said that he should hold as repossessed all Government property that had been seized. If it had not been seized, he should hold it. That was almost the first deliverance of that clear, convincing mind that marked the inaugural address. Men said, "How daring!" But he made it an accomplished fact. It was done, not dared! I am impressed in reading that address, and noting the changes made in it, to see that this moral directness of Abraham Lincoln follows through the very verbal changes that occurred in it. Mr. Seward proposed a change which he adopted, and Mr. Lincoln couched it in terms so simple that its strength is vastly enhanced, its meaning elevated, its incisive quality reinforced. As for instance, where Mr. Seward speaks of "the angel guardian of our nation," Lincoln speaks of the "guardian angels of our nation." It was no poetic

FROM POET TO PREMIER

matter with him. It was a question of what a man was fit for, and what he was to do with that he was fit for. He had this faculty of hovering over a subject, suspending his judgment, refusing to declare himself. He had not that vanity which so often confronts us in men of different life. We are so afraid not to be thought to have an opinion. That is a fearful state of mind, — a state of mind in which a man utters an opinion he really does not have, for fear it shall be thought that he has none.

When Lincoln had once decided upon a course there never was any deviation from it, unless proof could be given him that he was wrong in his judgments, because the facts were not before him. Not a single instance is remembered in which he revised his judgments because he had come to them by wrong direction. It is quite possible to be infallibly inspired and not infallibly informed. That definition has to be carried all through life. If the facts are not before you, of course your judgment is deficient in that regard, yet you may have a

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

moral directness, which, on the facts as given, is absolutely accurate as far as your own mind is concerned. I believe in the ethical judgments of the human soul. I know a very great man who is never wrong when he follows his own ethical judgments. If he ever makes mistakes, he makes them because he has taken too much advice. It is splendid to have good advisers ; it is a greater thing not to hear everything they say. The human soul is regnant in its own right on moral questions. It is not a question of class, or training, or opportunity, or anything else. Some of the most splendid, direct deliverances I have ever known have been from the humblest men and women of my acquaintance.

When, in his address of 1858, Lincoln spoke of the country as “ a house divided against itself ” that meant that no good could come until that condition should cease. He was labored with by those who said that this recognition, so early in his campaign, that the country was divided, would spoil his career. But he never took

FROM POET TO PREMIER

it back. He held by the quotation, not because it was in the Bible, but because it was true. He had the confidence in the everlasting reality of truth which made Cromwell's Ironsides invincible. It was a vain thing to try to engage Mr. Lincoln in matters of personal contention. He uttered this very trenchant sentence: "No man resolved to make the most of himself can spare time for personal contention." He was of the same mind with Emerson who at the second meeting of the Conference of Free Religion, said, "Let us leave controversy to communities more idle and more ignorant than ourselves."

Lincoln was absolutely free from all small vanities. The old story about the person who wants the last word did not apply to him in any instance. When his course was taken he did not alter it; and even when Mr. Chase refused to issue an order which the President had given, Mr. Lincoln simply sat down with him until he issued it. He brooked no interference with the moral judgments which concerned the whole people, but he had no

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

time for personal contention. This is illustrated by Lincoln's letter to Horace Greeley, who was impatient of Lincoln's course and wished him to take more immediate action.

EXECUTIVE MANSION,
WASHINGTON, August 22, 1863.

HON. HORACE GREELEY.

Dear Sir : — I have just read yours of the 19th, addressed to myself through the New York Tribune. If there be any statements or assumptions of fact that I may know to be erroneous, I do not, now and here, controvert them. If there be in it any inferences which I may believe to be falsely drawn, I do not, here and now, argue against them. If there be perceptible in it an impatient and dictatorial tone, I waive it in deference to an old friend whose heart I have always supposed to be right.

As to the policy I “seem to be pursuing,” as you say, I have not meant to leave anyone in doubt.

I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution. The sooner the national authority can be restored, the nearer the Union will be “the Union as it was.” If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time save slavery, I do not agree with them. If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time de-

FROM POET TO PREMIER

stroy slavery, I do not agree with them. My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it ; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it ; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union : and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union. I shall do more whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause. I shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors, and I shall adopt new views so fast as they shall appear to be true views.

I have here stated my purpose according to my view of official duty ; and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men everywhere could be free.

Yours, A. LINCOLN.

One is impressed in the study of Mr. Lincoln's life with this fact, that he did not at all care what became of him. He would say, "I think I shall hardly live out this term of the Presidency, the burden is so great." When Maryland had forbidden the passage of troops across her line, had severed connection by telegraph with the

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Northern States, and it was threatened that the capital itself should fall, Lincoln would walk up and down the rooms of the White House, and say, "Why do they not come? Why do they not come?" But he never expressed that solicitude about himself.

A ruling principle of this man's life was a reverence for opportunity to serve which was translated into terms of duty. The "stern daughter of the voice of God" was his daily confidant. We are continually saying that the world owes us this and this and this. The world owes us just one thing, and that is an opportunity. The world does not owe us a living. We have never done anything to justify the complaint that the world owes us a living. It owes us an opportunity to get on, and if we cannot get it, then it is either our fault or our misfortune. There are two classes of people in the world. One class feel that an open office is a kind of vacuum that is meant to suck them in. All they need is to get on the edge of it in order to have the vortex of the vacant office pull them in. It is a

FROM POET TO PREMIER

splendid thing to want to be employed; it is a much better thing to have something to sell in the market, that makes it worth while to employ you. Some people want place without regard to fitness. There is another set of people, — modest people, quiet people, who go on doing their best work, living up to the level of their opportunity. There never was an instance of fidelity like that but sooner or later it was recognized.

Mr. Lincoln answers one of our present fallacies. Scarcely a week passes but two or three times we hear the announcement in terms so frankly expressed that it almost seems true, that "man is the product of his environment." There is a fashion in our present sociological thinking that emphasizes that statement. Let us suppose one of the professors of one of our Universities to be responsible for the doctrine; you search Lincoln in vain for justification of the statement. You fix attention on his heredity and you find he has a certain loose-jointed ancestry (except in the remoter periods

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

which we really do not sufficiently know), the power of subduing the forests, power of enjoying life while doing it, the shifting from place to place,—all these you find; but you cannot account for that steady focus of mind which is his distinction; and as to his environment—he remembered the “hole of the pit from which he was dug and the rock from which he was hewed,” but in neither was there any proof of what he was to be. He simply availed himself of that great prerogative that God gives to his children to create a world when the world in which they were born does not fit them. And the creative energy of his life, its entry into life’s tragedy, his humor like that of Æsop and Aristophanes—the salty and pungent quality of his humor,—the statesmanship that he seems to have dug up out of his own inner consciousness; the adjustment to situations for which there was no precedent and which he grappled with as though he were the first man and his world the first world in a primal way,—all these

FROM POET TO PREMIER

things mark a creative spirit, and not a moulded man of clay dependent on environment for his impression and form.

Lincoln's idea of life might be summed up in the advice, make yourself fit to be something and do something, and then the opportunity and call to do it is sure to come. If you have anything to say, somebody wants to hear it. If you have anything to do, somebody wants you to do it.

General Grant's estimate of Lincoln was that "he was a man of pure idealism, of unselfish nature, full of forgiveness to his enemies, bearing malice toward none, and proved to be the man of all others to conduct the struggle through which the nation had to pass."

We are constantly asked with regard to great men, "What is their attitude toward religion?" Mr. Lincoln was a profoundly religious man, in the true sense of the word. There is really only one great church, and it has the sky for its dome and the horizon for its walls, and all devout souls belong in it, of every

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

name and creed and of no name and no creed. They are the children of the living God, Who speaks to them and they obey, and to Whom they speak and He hears, and the sacraments of their lives are the daily duties that they do and the ministries that they accomplish are the daily fidelities which engage them. That is the only church of the living God. All others are attempts, more or less successful, to find a substitute for these simple, elemental conditions.

It is not surprising that Lincoln said on one occasion, "I have never united myself with any church, because I have found difficulty in giving my assent without mental reservation to the long, complicated statements of Christian doctrine which characterize their articles of belief and confession of faith." Then he added very seriously: "When any church will inscribe over its altars as its sole qualification for membership, the Saviour's condensed statement of both law and gospel, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul

FROM POET TO PREMIER

and with all thy strength and with all thy mind and thy neighbor as thyself,' that church will I join with all my heart and all my soul." That is the statement of his creed. He announced the ruling principle of life, namely, that there are but two words in religion, "God" and "the soul"; that all religions are the effort to build a bridge between these two, so that God may pass over to the soul consciously to the soul's experience, and the soul may find its way to God to its own great help and solace. All the history of religion, the philosophy of religion, all the forms of churches, all creeds are but attempts to bridge over between these two, and unite them. That Mr. Lincoln had discovered, and it is a great discovery for any man to have made.

We often think of Mr. Lincoln as the sad man of persistent humor. That was a curious contrast in his make-up,—inconsolably sad, but humorous to the very center of his being. And that is not an inconsistent combination. Our tears and

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

laughter lie close together. It is easy to pass from one to the other without any wrench or strain of the nature ; and perhaps we owe Mr. Lincoln's efficiency, the directness of his thought, as much to his humor as to his ethical judgments. Beware a man who has no humor, who has no sense of fun, who cannot understand a joke nor make one. He may be honest, but he is nearly useless. While this is a beautiful world, and a good world, it is an immensely funny world. With all its sadness, its tragedy, which has no interval between the acts, with all the nether part of life so bitterly and tragically sad, yet there never was in all the seventy-five million worlds that star the sidereal universe, so comic a world as this one, so susceptible of the grotesque, so curiously flung together, so intended to awaken the laughter of the children of God. I do not wonder that holy Saint Philip Neri spoke of "His house of holy mirth" ; and a man may be pure of heart and sane and strong whose chief act of grace, whose chief means of grace, is Homeric laughter. This was

FROM POET TO PREMIER

Lincoln's quality. You will remember that when a man came to him and began to upbraid him for some course he had pursued, of which this man could not possibly have had the opportunity to judge, Mr. Lincoln said, after the man had finished, "My dear sir, how very close you shave!" It was perfectly innocent, and how much better than to tell the man it was none of his business. How much better than to show him the door! It simply diverted his attention from a serious subject to himself, who, to Mr. Lincoln at that time, was not a serious subject.

No wonder they called him "Honest Abe"! It was not polite, but was meant to be a mark of distinction; most men are honest. Mr. Lincoln seemed to be structurally deficient in the temptation to small dishonesties; they had no place in his mind. No more did Mr. Lincoln know how to divert himself from the main current of honest aims; and that is a salvation in character; that is moral health. Mr. Lincoln's mind was built on simple basic lines. It was clear, crystalline, square,

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

undeviating, — all the adjectives that you can apply to a mind that is worth having, that from rim to center, from core to circumference, has nothing to hide and nothing to prevaricate. It was easy for people to understand when he said, “With malice toward none, with charity for all.” They understood that was the very temper of his mind.

Let us consider once more this singular quality of his of never hurrying his life. That seems a truism, a platitude, but it is not. There are more men worn out by getting to the next station than are ever killed by the train which they take. That is a tendency in American life, — to be always projecting oneself into the next scene of the act. Why should we clog the wheels of to-day’s travel with the complications that we bring over from to-morrow to entangle them? Lincoln quietly, soberly, patiently, waited for what the years would bring. No man is under any obligation to fill a large place. He is under obligation not to have any unoccupied margins in the place he seeks to fill. It is a great thing to

FROM POET TO PREMIER

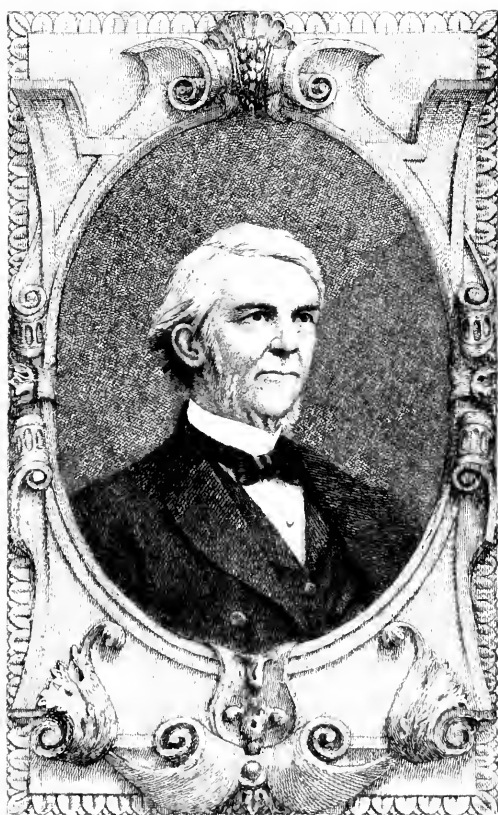
fill the place you are in, — not to rattle round in it. There are many misfits in life caused by people who are hurrying, who hardly get into one position before they are out of it, into the position that they seek to take or are fretting to secure. No need to argue for patience in a man who is hard pressed, nor to say that the man whose condition is so narrow that it cramps him with every breath he draws should be patient. It evinces lack of heart to argue patience for such a man. It is well for him to have a manly discontent and seek to better his condition. But to be occupied with what we are to be, rather than to fulfill the conditions in which we now stand, is a mistake.

When I was told by a young friend of mine, as I was years ago, "You can pretty well tell a man by the kind of necktie he wears," I said, "My boy, most people who have done any work in this world have never worn a necktie. They have worn their shirts open at the neck so as to get air." So all through the career that comes to us we are not to feel any anxiety about

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

self, but, as splendid old Carlyle said to us, “Work out that thing that God hath wrought in you.” There is a fashion in every man’s life, a pattern of his being. Patiently to stand by the loom of life, until the pattern is woven, until the warp and woof of it shows what texture his life is made of, — that is the great test of happiness, usefulness, and strength.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES



OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

THE FRIEND OF THE WORLD

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES might properly be called an “*occasional poet*,” if he were not so constant! No poet laureate of the English tongue has ever celebrated in poetry so many birthdays as Dr. Holmes. No one among his associates could escape the celebration he so gracefully bestowed; he seemed to have a preference for people who were seventy years old, or “seventy years young,” as he would say. There were James Freeman Clarke, William Cullen Bryant, Lowell, Whittier, and the others of the great galaxy in which he shone, whose seventieth birthdays became great events to them, because they were celebrated in verse by Dr. Holmes. Did not every wrinkle become a channel for a flood of mingled mirth and tears?

FROM POET TO PREMIER

If anybody had a choice of the life he would live, and he were not of extra heroic mould, he might well choose the life of Oliver Wendell Holmes. It was so uneventful for himself, that what happened to other people became an event for him. He was never, except in the two trips to Europe, very long out of sight of the Boston Statehouse. Of course he shared the feeling of all Bostonians with regard to his city. He was no modern Bostonian, rejoicing in the traditions of Boston, *but living in its suburbs!* He would have subscribed to Emerson's view on the reverse page of the essay on "Boston," where he tells the anecdote of the two men from Bologna and Florence respectively : "Said the citizen of Bologna to the citizen of Florence, 'If I were not a citizen of Bologna, I should wish to be a citizen of Florence.' Said the Florentine : 'Were I not a citizen of Florence' — 'You would wish to be a citizen of Bologna?' 'No! *I should wish to be a citizen of Florence!*'" That is typical of the place in which Dr. Holmes lived so long; it has been called

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

not a geographical location but a state of mind; and this is said in no spirit of criticism. Why should we not share the feeling, if we had the position in which Dr. Holmes found himself?

He came of what is called "the best New England stock," dealing also with New England not as a locality, but as a characteristic and separate racial development. The New England stock in his day was almost unmixed. Boston had not yet become an Irish city. Nowadays after six in the evening it is Hibernian, — none the worse for that, perhaps, certainly none the less witty; and one would suppose it might not be uncongenial to a mind like Oliver Wendell Holmes'; for certainly no one ever said anything funnier or more Irish, than his remark when told of the marriage of a lady of eighty to a man much her junior: "Of course there were no children, but were there any grandchildren?" That was so Irish in its reactions, — as Dr. Holmes would say professionally, in its "nervous reaction," — that no one born in Ireland could possi-

FROM POET TO PREMIER

bly fail to sympathize with it, if, being Irish, he could recognize it!

But Dr. Holmes came of this good, old, unmixed New England stock, that ran back to Hell on the one side in the severest orthodoxy and up to Heaven on the other in large liberality. He discovered that the title deeds were all in Heaven — while all other claims were by squatters' rights outside the Garden of Eden. So Dr. Holmes grew into a Unitarian and proceeded to cultivate the desert which lies outside Paradise. His father was a minister, so beautiful in countenance, Holmes tells us, that he could never have believed an unkind thing, and his mother of different line was a Liberal by descent. Holmes was born too to the conflicting traditions of Yale and Harvard; but beyond being born, practically nothing ever happened to him afterwards. He had a little group of friends who were actually companions. During his whole life, except the two years of medical study in Europe in the beginning of his career, and the "hundred days in Europe" celebrated in one of his later

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

books, he was never further away from Boston, for the most part, than Salem or Beverly, that Beverly, to which he referred in replying to a friend who had addressed a letter to him from "Manchester-by-the-Sea," as "Beverly-by-the-Depot." He went some summers to Pittsfield where he had a summer house, and where the sparkling Berkshire air seemed to suit his effervescent mind. But he was never "quite at home beyond the smell of the Charles River." He was educated at Phillips Andover, and went to Harvard in the celebrated class of '29. If you take the roster of that class you have volumes of national history before you.

To select only here and there a name from the roll-call of this illustrious class: William Henry Channing, James Freeman Clarke, Francis Boardman Crowning-shield, Benjamin Peirce, ("My Country 't is of Thee") Samuel F. Smith, and fifty others to each of whom Oliver Wendell Holmes was chronicler, poet, and friend; for next to knowing a man, "the friend of the world" delighted in describing him.

FROM POET TO PREMIER

It was this class he celebrated in '57 in a poem called "The Boys," beginning:

*"Has there any old fellow got mixed with the boys?
If there has take him out, without making a noise.
Hang the Almanac's cheat and the Catalogue's Spite!
Old Time is a liar! We're twenty to-night!"*

and so on through the characterization, bright, brief, sharp—not as lancets are but as homely herbs and biting spices are sharp; for Dr. Holmes had a great gift of giving you "a very warm pressure in the very grasp which conveyed a nettlesome burr." The only way to lay hold upon a thistle is to take it quickly and hard.

What could be tenderer than the closing lines of this poem:

*"And when we have done with our life-lasting toys,
Dear Father, take care of thy children, The Boys!"*

That is the kind of thing he did, as though in old age he had made common cause with the snowbirds who have no song but have a very enticing chirp. You will recall when Holmes wrote the life of

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

Emerson, that Colonel Higginson said it was "the life of a wood thrush written by a canary bird"; and that is about the relation between the oriental contemplative mind of Emerson and the trill and chirp and ringing clearness of Holmes. That class of '29 distinguished itself beyond all record!

Dr. Holmes having tried his hand at poetry took seriously to the study of medicine. It is a little difficult to think of him, not as diagnosing a case, but as wielding a lancet, and yet, after his private study with two physicians, and his years at the medical schools of his own and foreign countries, he became the demonstrator of anatomy in Harvard; always horrified by death, always shocked by the body of the dead, and yet going seriously and earnestly to work in the medical department in the field of anatomy, where he was most painstaking and faithful, and wrote the liveliest poetry or conceived it, almost in the very presence of the dead.

That is his story. He lived that life year after year, and the continuity of his

FROM POET TO PREMIER

literary temper is curiously shown by the first words of the series of papers contributed to the *Atlantic*, with Lowell as editor, coming as continuations of two papers written twenty-five years before for the *New England Magazine* and beginning with the words, "As I was just going to say when I was interrupted." This is the introduction to that charming group of people that could never have come together at the breakfast-table in any boarding-house except in Boston, and then only to take a lodging in that imagination which was "a feast of reason and a flow of soul." In these papers of "The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table" and fourteen years later in "The Poet at the Breakfast-Table," we get the first imprint of some of Dr. Holmes' most beautiful poems,—of most of the things that have endeared him to us, ostensibly read at this breakfast-table, which became an athenæum of literary experience instead of a hurried meal preparatory to catching a car. If we could have breakfast-tables on that plan, it would seem almost worth while to board. The very

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

reason for sitting at a table instead of eating from our hands over a cook-fire as our remotest peoples did, is that we may elevate that necessary function to a holy communion and a sacrament of the divine affections. That is what makes it so painful to go to a very intentional occasion—a formal social function—where every one feeds and no one says anything. At this breakfast-table of Autocrat and Poet things were said all the time—mostly, of course, by one person; others interrupted, and were soon again willingly and approvedly silent.

But it is when we see the Autocrat, the Professor, and the Poet at the breakfast-table that we are made aware what infinite leisure there was in the world in those days—if indeed it be not sacrilege to speak of that breakfast-table as being “in the world.” Its being, presumably, in Boston would be a proper limitation upon its worldliness in the age, so leisurely and contemplative, in which it was set for its well chosen *habitués*. Imagine for a moment a *commuter’s* breakfast-table by contrast! Had not the Germans anticipated us in making

FROM POET TO PREMIER

a distinction between “eating” and “feeding,” and “drinking” and “swilling,” we must have so adorned our American speech for purposes of expedition, had we indeed even become aware of the stillness of the early morning meal broken only by mastication—a sound welcome but to the keen ears of the devotees of that Fletcherism for which “the commuter” has no proper regard. Can it be possible that we are to become indebted to Horace Fletcher as the rediscoverer of the lost art of prandial conversation and the proper recovery of that ignored process, which comes to mind as once called “digestion”? It would be an honorable distinction, and that “mahogany,” apparently as irrecoverably remote as Arthur’s “Round Table,” might again be surrounded by human character and intelligent interest; but even so, Dr. Holmes could not be duplicated. The mould was broken from which were turned out the juicy products of his wisdom and wit—the earliest “serials” celebrated as a breakfast food. That they were pre-digested before being served does not

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

appear in the advertisement by which they are now to be commended to the over-driven people who make short work of beginning the day! "On your Mark! Go!" and they are off!

What of Dr. Holmes in himself? I have called him in the sub-title of this chapter "the friend of the world." Of course, you remember that phrase as stolen from Kipling's story of "Kim," whom he calls "*The Little Friend of the World*"; I could not speak of Dr. Holmes quite in that way, for though he was a little man, I feel that perhaps his Shade might not like the term. When evening approaches our shadow looks quite formidable as it stretches away from sunset. But I call him "the friend of the world" because he was the very embodiment of good will. I think he never declined from the heights of his spiritual communion with his fellows but once, and every man has to be foolish once in his mortal life before he becomes immortal. Angels are naturally immortal; human beings achieve it! You know how Browning's verse about Fitzgerald (born

FROM POET TO PREMIER

also in 1809) lies like a tear upon the remembrance of his lovers. Holmes could never have been bitter in his poetry; but when Homeopathy crossed his path, he wrote his essay for a medical meeting on "Homeopathy and its Kindred Delusions," and it certainly was a very foolish piece of writing. It was, beyond words, dogmatic; he might have been a theologian so dogmatic was it. It would seem that his dogmatism had persuaded him that he had a moral mission to decry all things as charlatanism that were not "regular practice." So many fences have been taken down since then, that we have acquired a great assortment of building material for other things. To use an excluding barrier for an including home marks the rise in the use of raw material. Of course he thought he was right, but of course we know now that he was not. Perhaps he was tangled in the philosophy of Homeopathy, and forgot to count up the recoveries in the hospitals, and the tombstones erected to the failures of his fellow-practitioners. We forgive him that, because

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

we do not wish to think of the singer interrupting his song to groan or to cry out sneeringly at others not of his mind. Every hissing sibilant hurts the roundness of the tone in singing. With the exception of this "pet aversion" his good temper was amazing. I should say it was a benediction to be associated with such a character, or even to follow remotely the reception of his productions; so generous was he that it was almost impossible for him to refuse anything for which any one appealed to him. He was asked once to write a poem and he refused,—a poem introductory to a prize fight; but it seems as though nothing else escaped him. No dinner could be held, no birthday could be celebrated, no gathering of friends could be convened unless Holmes had something to say for the enlightenment of the occasion or the instruction of the company. His poetry always carries a serious and real meaning under all its laughter. His gift was not simply "to see" but "to make see," as Browning says; not simply to awaken laughter, but to make the laughter melodi-

FROM POET TO PREMIER

ously flow into song, to run up the scale of mellifluous sounds and back again to the heart, finding the verse in harmony with the best instincts of our nature.

It is easy to imagine that as soon as he became known he grew to be the center of the letter-writing public. The fact is, Holmes himself was not a letter-writer, and it was the struggle of his life to know what to do with those people who, if he neglected them, were offended, and if he answered them, might be more offended still. However, he did largely answer this correspondence in conscientious fashion. He had no amanuensis. He lived before the days of formal replies in printed form such as the editor and the bereaved family now send. Letters were taken more seriously then; the postage was more expensive, the number of letters written, less; but Holmes could never convince himself that anybody who had taken the pains to write a letter to him should be denied a reply. The replies were brief, often trenchant, always kind; sometimes the kindest thing is surgery! His regular

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

correspondence, to which his biographer is indebted, was of the slightest. There were the early letters to Phineas Barnes, and beyond that only Lowell and Mrs. Stowe and one other constituted his steady correspondents. Mr. Morse, in making that biography, found little help in his letters, they were so few, and the material furnished in his published writings was so profuse.

It may be said of Holmes, as of Shelley, that all "his poems are fragments of self-revelation." The Autocrat talks of himself with the same impersonality that he might use in speaking of any other well-known person. That is quite a possible state of mind; if you are profoundly interested in the things you think, you forget that it is *you* who are thinking; you lose the sense of egotism; egoism simply takes the place of egotism. Even "Childe Roland" told in the first person of his dreadful coming "to the Dark Tower":

*"Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
And blew. 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came!'"*

FROM POET TO PREMIER

And we would not have the Autocrat less autocratic or desire him to speak in other than in the first person. When the Professor appears it is simply a change of the mask ; still the same person speaking, — as in the old Greek plays. All the wonderful, clever things said by George Meredith's people are really borrowed from the creator of these people. What could be more natural if you make a man or woman, than that you should furnish the lines they are to speak? So we find in these self-revelations the questions that were occupying Dr. Holmes' own mind — the question, for instance, of heredity which appeared in "Elsie Venner," and "The Guardian Angel," and one or two others of his books.

With a man so human it was inevitable that he should be of a profoundly religious nature. He was, as you all know, pre-eminently one of our great writers of hymns. I remember William B. Carpenter, President of the British Association, after preaching in an American pulpit, taking out of his pocket a copy of Holmes,

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

and giving out the hymn which he said he never traveled without and was in the habit of reading again and again himself :

*Lord of all being, throned afar,
Thy glory flames from sun and star ;
Centre and soul of every sphere,
Yet to each loving heart how near !*

*Sun of our life, thy quickening ray
Sheds on our path the glow of day ;
Star of our hope, thy softened light
Cheers the long watches of the night.*

*Our midnight is thy smile withdrawn ;
Our noontide is thy gracious dawn ;
Our rainbow arch thy mercy's sign :
All, save the clouds of sin, are thine.*

*Lord of all life, below, above,
Whose light is truth, whose warmth is love !
Before thy ever-blazing throne
We ask no lustre of our own.*

*Grant us thy truth to make us free,
And kindling hearts that burn for thee,
Till all thy living altars claim
One holy light, one heavenly flame.*

It seems inevitable that Holmes with his devout and happy nature should be a

FROM POET TO PREMIER

maker of hymns and holy songs. They naturally belong in the "house of holy mirth." It is a beautiful thing to go into some place of worship, gloomy with tradition and threatening as to destiny, and find the hymn-book illuminated with the hymns of Whittier, Longfellow, and Holmes. Lowell — a prolific poet — wrote only one or two hymns. Lowell's poetry easily turns to argument; hymns do not argue, they inspire! Holmes is the natural hymnist of the religious life. His are those holy songs familiar in every church where the hymns are not simply devoted to the rhyming of definitions of Doctrine; but in which *life is sung*. Do we not all recall:

"O Love Divine, that stooped to share"?

and the Army Hymn:

*"O Lord of Hosts! Almighty King!
Behold the sacrifice we bring!
To every arm thy strength impart;
Thy spirit shed through every heart!"*

The quality of his poetry lends itself easily to song but it is thoughtful also; as

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

we see in the Lowell poem and preëminently in "The Chambered Nautilus"; he is able to lift poetry to ethics without losing its movement or power. His ethics was articulated, not ossified; its bony structure was clothed with sensitive flesh. His poems were sincere to the last degree, and those in praise of his associates may, one and all, be tried by their biographers and shall be found true. The poem in honor of Lowell, read at the Tavern Club on Lowell's seventieth birthday in 1889, is one of these.

This birthday poem deals out praise in terms of argument to prove the wrong use of the familiar terms "critic," "poet," "patriot," by showing they may still be retained for better service. After rehearsing all these words should not mean, he reaches a conclusion as —

*"He is the Critic, whose divining rod
Tells where the waters hide beneath the sod,
Whom studious search through varied lore has taught,
The streams, the rills, the fountain-heads of thought!*

and

FROM POET TO PREMIER

*“ He is the Poet who can stoop to read
The secret hidden in a wayside weed
Whom June’s warm breath with child-like rapture
fills,
Whose spirit ‘ dances with the daffodils.’ ”*

And for that much misunderstood and old-fashioned character the “ patriot ” he has words as brave as the patriot’s deeds :

*“ Who, born a poet, grasps his trenchant rhymes
And strikes unshrinking at the Nation’s Crimes.”*

Thus the genial doctor *prescribes*, because he sees in his friend Lowell, “ the poet,” “ critic,” and “ patriot ”; discovering in his subject the very character he himself illustrates.

The “ Chambered Nautilus,” apart from its beauty, is a sermon without its dullness and with the brevity that pleases — the brevity that fulfills the conditions advised by old Dr. Lowell, who, when asked how long a sermon should be, said, “ twenty minutes, with a leaning to mercy.” Holmes sings :

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

THE CHAMBERED NAUTILUS

THIS is the ship of pearl, which poets feign,
Sails the unshadowed main, —
The venturous bark that flings
On the sweet summer wind its purple wings
In gulfs enchanted, where the Siren sings,
And coral reefs lie bare,
Where the cold sea-maids rise to sun their streaming
hair.

Its webs of living gauze no more unfurl;
Wrecked is the ship of pearl!
And every chambered cell,
Where its dim dreaming life was wont to dwell,
As the frail tenant shaped his growing shell,
Before thee lies revealed, —
Its irised ceiling rent, its sunless crypt unsealed!

Year after year beheld the silent toil
That spread his lustrous coil;
Still, as the spiral grew,
He left the past year's dwelling for the new,
Stole with soft step its shining archway through,
Built up its idle door,
Stretched in his last found home, and knew the old no
more.

Thanks for the heavenly message brought by thee,
Child of the wandering sea,
Cast from her lap, forlorn!

FROM POET TO PREMIER

*From thy dead lips a clearer note is born
Than ever Triton blew from wreathèd horn !
While on mine ear it rings,
Through the deep caves of thought I hear a voice that
sings : —*

*Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll !
Leave thy low-vaulted past !
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea !*

How naturally this shell is filled again with contents, vital as thought and permanent as soul. Compare this rise into a moral ideal with the postscript affixed by Wordsworth to “The Primrose” fourteen years after it had been discovered on the rock.

*“ Sin-blighted though we are, we too,
The reasoning Sons of Men,
From one oblivious winter called
Shall rise, and breathe again ;
And in eternal summer lose
Our threescore years and ten.*

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

*“ To humbleness of heart descends
This prescience from on high,
The faith that elevates the just,
Before and when they die ;
And makes each soul a separate Heaven,
A court for Deity.”*

Here speaks the trite moralist. Holmes has a less ethereal subject but lifts it to higher levels of feeling. “The Chambered Nautilus” is a poem to make Holmes a great poet if he had written no other, as the little poem “The Night has a Thousand Eyes” makes Bourdillon a true poet, though he has written nothing of equal value since.

Let us consider now the companionship which attended Dr. Holmes’ life and sanctified it. It is the pity of our present days that the genius of friendship is no longer in good repute. We have acquaintances ; we have few friends. We have no time to walk the road together, because each is so pressed by his separate errand. We are not even for the most part upon the errand of the Great King, but mostly hurrying on some little affair of our own, not necessarily ignoble, because the motive is

FROM POET TO PREMIER

often good; perhaps we are hardly chargeable with "the superstition of being busy"; but we are at least ungenial and unfriendly and lacking in the intimacies that mellow the tones of life. But here was a man who began with that great group of the class of '29 and many another; the intimate of Hawthorne, even when Hawthorne was most inaccessible and reticent; to whom Longfellow was a daily companion; who could sympathize with Whittier in his enthusiasm for the cause of the slave; who belonged to the Saturday Club, and the group of the *Atlantic Magazine*; here was a man who had *friends*. It is, perhaps, the nearest approach America has ever been able to show to aristocracy,—the society of "The Best" held together by the bond of companionship of congenial minds. A gentler, more refined group than those "The Mermaid Tavern" knew in a robuster time, which Johnson, Webster, and Shakespeare made illustrious. And Holmes outlived all "The Boys"; one after another they dropped away in old age, and he was left, not

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

as the "Last Leaf" that he celebrated in his quaint poem, but as the last fruit hanging still upon one wintry bough, — sole survivor of a great fruitage, on which a kindly sky had smiled for many a summer.

It is not to be expected that the name of Holmes would appear in the list of the Transcendentalists — that group which was really giving American poetry which an Englishman would tolerate, as worth attention. In the new world only Poe had commended himself to France, as having literary genius and eccentricity of beauty which would satisfy the French taste. All others were too sober in temper to be eccentric, and too normal — perhaps too moral — in subject to be interesting. Holmes could not compete even with the Transcendentalists at home. A wind blew through all his writing which left no obscuring mist to pique curiosity as to what it hid, or suggest profounder meanings to the initiated. Holmes had no "school of thought." There were those among his fellows who secretly felt him

FROM POET TO PREMIER

too mirth-provoking. He was irresistible as a companion; one surrendered to the charm of his wit and human interest; still, men of his period found Emerson more satisfying, and an impersonal overshadowing of the soul of man by "The Oversoul" more instructive than a *gay expansion* of the soul of itself.

It would be a disappointment to find that Holmes belonged to a "community" — even the New Jerusalem of Brook Farm! Emerson did not join this exclusive group to which George William Curtis gave two sunny years of his boyhood. But Emerson loved to visit these amateurs in farming and adepts in philosophy, to sit with them by the winter's fire and to illustrate the joy of "long winter nights, made memorable by radiant conversation." Had Holmes been of the number his flickering humor would have intruded upon the mellowness of the diffused and spreading glow about the fire. Indeed, it is quite likely that this will-o'-the-wisp might have found the atmosphere too dry and rare for such an elf-like spark to enlighten. It

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

was the atmosphere through which to see the stars. Lowell was of the Transcendental group; but this did not prevent him from making better use of political enthusiasm than the satirists of the Revolution were able to do. "The Biglow Papers" flash fire, the earlier satires strike flint-on-steel only now and then. Longfellow had no ticket of admission to these high counsels of the Transcendent for the same reason that Holmes failed of entrance; both were *companions of the average man* charged with no greater commission than to keep company with all men on the main traveled road, sharing their dusty repast and relishing their homely talk, and very observant of the small features of the landscape and the unimportant characteristics of the company—an outline picture of a Canterbury pilgrimage on the more frequented highway of life. To Emerson and Margaret Fuller, and even to the reticence of Hawthorne or the remoteness of Thoreau, there were many interesting things in life; especially if around them there hovered a radiant nimbus, not

FROM POET TO PREMIER

quite of the earth; but to Holmes the humanity itself was interesting and its commonness was the incentive for celebrating it in verse; his ideals went on foot and were travel-stained. For all his amiability and good fellowship, the others used him for vacations from their accustomed and more difficult occupations of mind. One feels that Holmes seized upon the birthdays of these "twice-born" Brahmins to remind them that they also were children of the soil, whose advent was only fit to be sung to the accompaniment of his small pipe. He must have somewhat sympathized with Father Taylor's estimate of Transcendentalism, that it was like a gull, — "Lean body, poor feathers, and miserable meat!" And yet here the old sailors' preacher was for once unobserved of the sea. For Transcendentalism was not a gull to be picked by the hand of criticism, but a gull on the wing, above the reach of any unsympathetic anatomist. Emerson, Alcott, Ellery Channing, Thoreau, and Jones Very may well have seemed to the seamen's chaplain and

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

to practical poets such as Holmes and Longfellow as dealing with matter "over our heads," but, to look at things over our heads is to see them against a background of the sky!

Talking with his son on a Sunday afternoon in October, 1894, Dr. Holmes leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, and entered upon the eternal youth he had so often described.

Thinking of all this we make a plea for the things of the soul, for the regenerating influence of kindly intercourse, for the genius of a love that has no passion, but has a heavenly and divine affection. Oliver Wendell Holmes had this to make him, to bless him, to be with him, to shape and fashion and mould all his pliant mind. He is the minister of good-will, the apostle of the gentle life, the man who teaches us that it is worth while to be good and do good, in no strange way, but because it is the natural effluence of the mind; and he stands, to one's thinking, not perhaps as the first poet among our singers, but as the first in showing what song is for; not with

FROM POET TO PREMIER

so wide a sweep as Lowell, but with a delicate touch of his own. He was no eagle—by no means a domestic fowl—but he was a comfortable singer with no strain in his mind to put strain on ours; he had something to say and he said it in fluent numbers. He was not a master of romance like Tennyson, but he had a true ear and a true nature and the art of clothing simple truths in poetic expression.

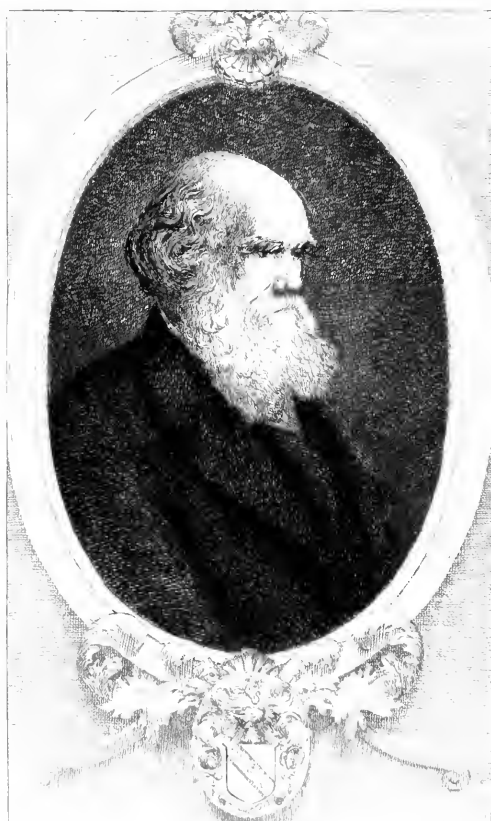
An essayist, nowadays, chiefly tries to give information; but we are loaded with information; the principal reason we are not wiser is that we cannot digest the information we already have. “Of the making of books there is no end” except the end where they begin. But Holmes simply wanted to tell what was in his life and he took the essay form. His essays are almost like the essays of Charles Lamb; not quite, for you could not make an essay just like Lamb’s without being just where Lamb was. Rereading recently these papers in the *Atlantic*, it seemed to me that nobody is writing now such intimate and sparkling

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

essays; nothing so true to life, so deep in purpose, so clear in the shine of them, so human, so instinct with the divine good will as these of Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Friend of the World.”



CHARLES DARWIN



CHARLES DARWIN

THE BELIEVING SCEPTIC

IN calling Charles Darwin the believing sceptic we are paying him, perhaps, the greatest compliment that can be paid by one mind to another, for to follow the constancy of nature with an insatiable curiosity, and to believe in its constancy with an inquiring mind is a rare combination of faith and adventure. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for," and the sceptic is the man of expectant mind. We think of scepticism too often as a defect of character, whereas it may well be the putting of a premium upon adventure; the sceptic is not the doubter, he is the inquirer, the man whose sails are always ready to be spread, whose compass has been inspected and made true, and whose faith in the adventure and enterprise of life never fails.

FROM POET TO PREMIER

Two sets of people have unconsciously combined to make the progress of the world. The one comprises *the mystics* who have been ever ready to bring their sacrifices to the altars of devotion, and the other group is formed of *the sceptics*, who clear the air with the breath of their lips, kindling a brighter flame upon the altars of religion that the sacrifices may burn; and these two groups are the centrifugal and centripetal forces of our planet's mental motion, the one holding to the center of realities and the other driving us upon our path and orbit.

It was not an accident that Charles Darwin was an inquirer. His grandfather, the quaint interesting character whose biography Charles Darwin wrote, was a physician and a poet; a physician who refused to be a materialist, and a poet who refused to cease to be practical. The strain of Darwin's tendency is seen in Erasmus Darwin the grandfather,—in the fact that the things by which the older man is remembered are not the cures he effected but the poems he wrote on the

CHARLES DARWIN

“Loves of the Plants.” Already there had begun the conviction that sexual attraction and variation of species descended, through all the orders of life, to the lowest forms; and though one cannot take Erasmus Darwin’s poetry very seriously, it is tremendously interesting as prophecy. So in that rather prolix poem called the “Botanical Garden,” the division devoted to the “Loves of the Plants” is already a prophecy of what Charles Darwin was later to discover among the limpets, the beetles, and the angleworms.

I suppose Charles Darwin would hardly have written a poem about “the loves” of the angleworms; but he certainly discovered “natural selection” among the lowest forms of life; he devoted eight and one-half years to the study of certain little mollusca, and then hesitated to publish his discoveries for fear there might be new developments that had not yet come under his notice. So loyal was he to the sanctities of the natural world that he feared to miss any secret hid within the shell of the humblest creation; to him every shellfish

FROM POET TO PREMIER

concealed a pearl. One does not suppose that a limpet felt itself a wonder, or that the little crustaceae in their tiny shells, with mother-of-pearl enclosing the secret of their life, were ready to surprise the world; but the expectant mind has a welcome for every comer, and the inquirer finds the world an answering exclamation point to his note of inquiry!

Darwin's father was a physician. One thing came to Charles Darwin out of his medical ancestry, and that was continued ill health. He was a chronic invalid, in no way lacking courage, also confirmed and constant. And yet it must be said of his father, who accumulated a fortune in his profession, that his bodily presence was more efficacious than his drugs. Thus are we heirs of the spirit, even while martyrs by bodily ills. The vigor of the father developed opposition to the son. The elder Darwin was distressed that Charles should show the traits of his grandfather and great-grandfather. He longed for one practical man out of this long line of seekers for nature's secrets. But Charles

CHARLES DARWIN

Darwin was a "collector" from the beginning; he made a collection of stones, counting the pebbles, as his father had made a census of the village, counting the houses; and estimating the number of people in the houses so accurately that it corresponded almost exactly with the official census taken a few years later. The young naturalist was told by his father that he would prove a disgrace to himself and to his family, because he persisted in these things and could not fit himself for Edinburgh University. He did finally find himself entering upon what he calls "joyful years," arriving, in spite of irregular preparations, at Christ's College, Cambridge (Milton's college), there chiefly studying mathematics. Such confidence had he in the immutable truth of nature that the *exact sciences* claimed his attention and devotion.

In January, 1831, Darwin received his B. A. degree at Cambridge and reports that he gained a good place among the crowd of men who do not "go in for honors." His father then found himself confronted by the young man's project (at the age of twenty-

FROM POET TO PREMIER

three) of accompanying the expedition of H. M. S. "Beagle" round the world; Captain Fitzroy, the commander of the expedition, having announced that in this circumnavigation he would take with him any young man who would pay his own way and fulfill certain other reasonable requirements. This Captain Fitzroy was a devoted follower of Lavater, and Charles Darwin having a nose that pointed toward heaven, more or less, stumbled upon the prejudices of Captain Fitzroy as a student of physiognomy; he almost lost in consequence the opportunity to go with Fitzroy because his nose was the wrong shape. When he brought the matter of this five-year voyage to his father's attention, the father could see no reason why a young man who had tried two or three universities and private schools and had achieved no startling success, should go away for five years in pursuit of the flora and fauna of the world; so he made this agreement in his fine disdain of adventure; that he would consent to his son's going (he was a rich man and there was no question of the means) and to

CHARLES DARWIN

his retaining the specimens he collected, provided he could “bring the approval of the plan from any sensible man!” This was that covenant which between father and son looked like an impossible sacrifice. But it proved quite otherwise; the son went off shooting, as usual, upon his uncle’s estate; for he was devoted to a gun in other ways than for purposes of “collecting,” and he had also learned from a Negro, probably a West Indian, at Edinburgh, the art of the taxidermist. In the field, gun in hand, he happened to mention his project to this uncle, who immediately ordered the horses harnessed and drove thirty miles to tell the father what an excellent plan it was; thus winning the consent of the “practical man” by the argument of another “man of sense.”

This expedition of the “Beagle” has been set forth *in extenso* in the journals of Darwin and in the reports, made by him after his return. The expedition itself lasted five years and two months, and Darwin landed in England at the end of that time

FROM POET TO PREMIER

loaded down with specimens of every kind. He had made discoveries that were of primary importance; had ciphered out and made real the causes which produced the coral islands, — he was a discoverer of the coral as the abode of living forms. He had conquered many difficulties which would have hindered less determined men. For instance, he found in the Argentine Republic all the regions outside of the cities infested by marauders who gave small immunity for life and safety to any intruder. The Indians, faithful in all else, refused to go with him through so dangerous a territory, and he traveled almost alone four hundred miles, bringing back safely from so adventurous a trip — this believing sceptic, this faithful inquirer — the treasures of his expedition. It was to him a small matter to brave death for the sake of a new orchid or a new beetle. This is only an instance of what he went through of storm and stress during these five years. A part of the storm and stress came from the temper of Captain Fitzroy, who was apt to drop into wrath on any or no provoca-

CHARLES DARWIN

tion. When the wind died out Captain Fitzroy could be trusted to blow a blast, and set all things flying before the gale. Those who shared his cabin, as did young Darwin, wished for the open sea! Quarrels innumerable there were between them; Darwin, however, surmounting all difficulties by his inherent kindness of heart, suffering periodic explosions from Fitzroy upon questions of no importance, and receiving as frequent apologies. “Enduring hardness” these five years had made him suspicious of ease.

In December of 1836, after the delight of his return home had been experienced, he moved to Cambridge and says of it: “The evil I found in Cambridge was its being too pleasant,” — a charm even a casual traveler must feel in its beautiful and poetic associations. Here was, for instance, wonderful courage, — a courage which is the complete answer to the people who insist that courage lies in a certain rapidity of the circulation and a resisting callousness of mind. Here was a man, compact of all sensibilities, simple as a

FROM POET TO PREMIER

child, adding “golden rule” to “golden rule,” in the quality of his mind and behavior, and with a courage far beyond comparison with that of any *bravo*, for it was the courage of a man in perpetual ill health — of a man standing on the quaking edge of the uncertainty of life, and finding in the earthquake throes of his own nervous condition the very incentive to work; under daily peril of death he worked with the leisure of a man who expected to live forever. He did achieve immortality, to which no man may make haste!

Then there was his concentration; it was that which made him take mathematics at Christ's College, a college in a university which is not only the university of the poets, but preëminently of the *exact sciences*. This concentration followed him through life. Inquiry being made of James Martineau as to the time when the world might hope to receive from the press the great work on “Ethics” upon which he had been engaged for twenty-five years, that master in philosophy wrote in effect: “*I am hesitating to publish lest some author may*

CHARLES DARWIN

have written what I had not read, or some new utterance shall be made which I had not waited to hear." This he laments as a "disloyalty to the truth" which needs no man to wait for its final deliverance! This same desire "to hold the forms for the last returns," shows throughout Darwin's long investigation. As late as 1875 he says in issuing his work *Insectivorous Plants*, "I begin to think that everyone who publishes a book is a fool!" This is the same self-distrust which in 1859 he felt in publishing *The Origin of Species*. "How frequent, how almost universal it is in an author to persuade himself of the truth of his own dogmas. My only hope is that I certainly see many difficulties of gigantic stature." That was always the attitude of Darwin, always humble in the presence of the wonders of nature. "I fear the study of the cirripedia (degenerate mollusca, barnacles, and others) will ever remain 'wholly unapplied,' and yet I feel that such study is better than castle-building!" He was never content to put a period to his studies; he expected surprises

FROM POET TO PREMIER

on every hand, and this concentration is shown in the months and years he would spend on what seemed to be the slightest subjects: discussion of the orchids; consideration of the mollusca; "The formation of vegetable mould by the action of the worms"; "The movements and habits of climbing plants"; "The expression of the emotion in man and animals"; and so through an immense range of phenomena. Years went into these studies, years often interrupted by months of illness. Strange that the two men who have changed the thinking of the English mind, Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, were both men of ill health.

With Darwin's concentration there went no egotism; he was, perhaps, the least egotistic of men! He was so open-minded that the severest critic became at once his friend. So eager was he to know what the other man saw of his mistakes that he could not content himself to close the book he had written for fear some one might have discovered something he should repair. This is abundantly and impressively

CHARLES DARWIN

shown in his letters to Lyell, the geologist, and to Sir Joseph Hooker, who lived long enough to celebrate with Wallace the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of the *Origin of Species*. He was even tolerant of the clerical dissent; it would not have been possible to him to utter so savage a criticism as was implied in Huxley's statement that "even an English bishop had learned that you could not carry water-tight compartments in the same mind." Huxley used his lancet for dissection in the laboratory; but he always kept it ready besides for any abnormal growth in the mind of his critics. But Darwin was so eager to learn, that he was never impatient of any criticism, and the "Life and Letters" compiled by his son are an amazing testimony to the equanimity of his mind and the gentleness of his disposition. In 1839 he married his first cousin, Emma Wedgwood, daughter of Josiah of the Pottery, and the Kingdom of Heaven! He had the invaluable advantage of a wife who had no other business in life but to take care of him. Late in life he writes of her: "I marvel

FROM POET TO PREMIER

that she, so infinitely my superior in every single moral quality, should have consented to be my wife. She has been my wise adviser and cheerful comforter through a long life which would have been without her, through very long periods, a miserable one from ill health. She has earned the love of every soul near her." It is this angelic ministry which cast its glory upon worms and orchids. Let us rejoice that in this "natural selection" in the moral sphere of two great souls there rose the opportunity to study "the laughter of little children" as illustrating an aspect of evolution significant to the student and absorbing to the parent.

As riches went then, Charles Darwin was a rich man, so that he was relieved of the necessity of earning his living, and could devote himself as an acolyte before the altars of God. Many a clerical "believer" might have learned the very essence of faith in this "believing sceptic's" attitude towards truth! And many a plutocrat may feel the rebuke of a man who knew the uses of wealth.

CHARLES DARWIN

It is dramatic to think that Wallace, in the Asian Archipelago, should have made practically the same discoveries in their beginnings that Darwin had made in the voyages of the "Beagle." When in 1858 Darwin was ready to publish *The Origin of Species*, Wallace sent him an essay prepared in the Asian Archipelago, in which he had reached exactly the same results which Darwin had come to by the studies of twenty-five years. Each had verified his compass on this uncharted sea and laid down for all voyagers a path in the trackless waters. Here was a tragic moment for these two men! Wallace knew nothing of Darwin's theory, for nothing had been published; to Wallace it had come in a sudden burst of light; to Darwin it had come through the study and working up of a theory by small discoveries accumulating for twenty-five years. Within a week of his discovery, Wallace sent his essay to Darwin, and Darwin immediately offered to withdraw from publication his *Origin of Species*, that Wallace might have the benefit of the inspiration that had come

FROM POET TO PREMIER

to him. Wallace happily was brave and fine enough to refuse that advantage. "I did not then know," said Darwin, "how generous and noble was his disposition." Then Darwin undertook to bring out for Wallace, contemporary with his own discoveries, the discoveries that had been made on the other side of the world. The two papers were presented jointly to the Linnæan Society (1858) by Lyell and Hooker. The papers were entitled respectively *The Tendency of Species to form Varieties* and *The Perpetuation of Varieties and Species by Natural Selection*. This generous rivalry to exalt each the other reads like a page out of the Beatitudes, rather than out of the "Law of the Survival of the Fittest"; and yet it is not so; for it is a characteristic of the scientific mind to rise above the inhumanities of the competitive mind; it devotes itself to the inspirations that come dropping its way out of the unnumbered resources of nature. Wallace lived long enough to be at the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Origin of Species* and to pay a final tribute to Dar-

CHARLES DARWIN

win in an article published last year on “The Present Position of Darwinism.”¹ I will quote a passage from it to show that the fine character of Wallace, though mixed with very grave defects as to the action of his mind, lasted through all the fifty years of his continuous study :

“ To any one who has devoted a considerable portion of his life to the study of nature, both in field and in cabinet, both at home and in distant regions, the vast complex of phenomena presented by the organic world, with its endless specific forms, their myriad relations and adaptations, the laws of their development in the past and their distribution in the present, is almost overwhelming in its grandeur and its beauty. Almost all such loving students of nature have found in the theory of Darwin, in his many stimulating works and in those of his friends and followers, the only intelligible clue to the mighty labyrinth of nature. To such students of nature the claims of the Mutationists and the Mendelians, as made by many of their ill-informed supporters, are ludicrous in their exaggeration and total misapprehension of the problem they profess to have solved. To set upon a pinnacle this mere side-issue of biological research, as if it comprised within itself all the phenomena and problems presented by the organic cosmos, is calculated to bring ridicule upon what, in its place,

¹ Contemporary Review : August, 1908.

FROM POET TO PREMIER

may be an interesting and perhaps useful line of study. To myself these monstrous claims suggest a comparison with those of the perhaps equally enthusiastic and equally ill-informed admirers of the immortal Pickwick, who believed his ‘Speculations on the Source of the Hampstead ponds with some Observations on the Theory of Tittlebats,’ to have been a most important contribution to the science of that period.”

It is a significant thing that Wallace, who gave this tribute to his old friend and refused to be his competitor, was of an entirely different religious temperament. Darwin had not much interest in organized and institutional religion; he was always more or less attached to the Church of England, and was the faithful helper of Mr. Innes, the rector of his parish; Wallace believed in spirits, and divided his time between natural science and spiritualism; he was a “familiar” not of the orders of the earth simply but of the celestial orders; but though he had this, as one may think, impairing interest, he was not diverted from his devotion to the real discoveries in the field of science nor from the sciences themselves. Mention

CHARLES DARWIN

of this is made, because it encourages us to believe that when we have found people out they may still have surprises for us. There are difficulties in exploring what is 'called by the unscientific "the other world"; but chief among these difficulties is the absorbing interest of "this present world," which is as yet almost entirely unexplored. Our amazement must not be mistaken for knowledge; it is the confession of ignorance.

One of Darwin's disabilities was that he could not draw. Many of his discoveries were made almost useless from the fact that he could neither bring the specimens back with him nor any representation of them.

A singular change went on in course of time in his mind, of which he made record in a charming autobiography that he wrote as late as 1881, for his children, as follows:

"I have said that in one respect my mind has changed during the last twenty or thirty years. Up to the age of thirty, or beyond it, poetry of many kinds, such as the works of Milton, Gray, Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, gave me great pleasure, and even as a schoolboy I took in-

FROM POET TO PREMIER

tense delight in Shakespeare, especially in the historical plays. But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry ; I have tried lately to read Shakespeare and found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. I have also lost my taste for pictures or music. Music generally sets me thinking too energetically on what I have been at work on, instead of giving me pleasure. I retain some taste for fine scenery, but it does not cause me the exquisite delight which it formerly did. On the other hand, novels which are works of the imagination, though not of a very high order, have been for years a wonderful relief and pleasure to me, and I often bless all novelists. A surprising number have been read aloud to me, and I like all, if moderately good, and if they do not end unhappily — against which a law ought to be passed. A novel, according to my taste, does not come into the first class unless it contains some person whom one can thoroughly love, and if a pretty woman, all the better.

“ This curious and lamentable loss of the higher æsthetic tastes is all the odder, as books of history, biographies, and travels (independently of any scientific facts which they may contain), and essays on all sorts of subjects interest me as much as ever they did. My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts, but why this should have caused

CHARLES DARWIN

the atrophy of that part of the brain alone on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive. A man with a mind more highly organized or better constituted than mine, would not, I suppose, have thus suffered ; and if I had to live my life again, I would have made a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once every week ; for probably the parts of my brain now atrophied would thus have been kept active through use. The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature.”

We immediately inquire what was the occasion of this loss of the taste for poetry while he was engaged continually in a work that must tax the imagination ; for the scientist must be a man of marvelous imaginative power. With every door that science opens the seer looks down avenues of mystery and hears prophecies of things that sometimes never come to pass. He must often soothe his disappointment with the conviction that “ the possible always is ; whatever centuries elapse before it appears.” Yet Darwin’s was an imagination which by a specialization of effort —

FROM POET TO PREMIER

being done with the seraphim to consort with the angleworm—has no use for poetic fancy, because he was so immersed in the things of earth that he had apparently lost touch with the world of poetry. What can be the causes of this?

The first cause, as I think, lies in that very habit of specialization. It is the infirmity of the specialist that the work narrows his vision whilst it widens his interest! His interests are now in the crowded multiform facts of earth; but this interest in them is accompanied by a close scrutiny of the narrow field of observation. “He cannot see the forest for the trees!” Specialization has that tendency always. We are living now in a time of minutest specialization, not a time of tremendous poetic expression. If the specialist can avoid crass materialism, he saves his soul alive, because it does not then end in his saying that all the possibilities of life are under the microscope at that moment. But the inevitable *tendency* of the man who deals with the infinitely little is to lose the wider vision. The naturalist is

CHARLES DARWIN

introduced to a world infinitely extended in time and space; he pushes back the chronology of organic life to Tertiary times, but the picture narrows to his view, for he has found the sacred grave of some fossil ape for which he seeks a place on the genealogical tree of Haeckel, to supply a new reason for "Man's Place in Nature" to match Huxley's description of that place. To the specialist to be able to introduce to modern consideration the *Pithecantropus* or *Homo Primogenius* is far more important than to make a picture of the times in which they prepared for the modern man. Undoubtedly it is true that the femur or skull-cap, found in fossil remains, is more important than the genealogy of the patriarchs; but nevertheless it does not lend itself to poetry. It is too many feet under ground to scan as verse, and too remote in time to contribute to rhythm. And inevitably it produces a near-sighted view of things.

The second cause for this loss of poetry is the fact that Darwin had no health to spare, and must economize his efforts.

FROM POET TO PREMIER

He tells us that he read novels ; why ? Simply to pull the tailboard out of his mind and dump the contents ! He was a man who must work an hour and then rest an hour. The coming of company was so much an agitation to him that it destroyed his working power for days. He had a sand-walk around his house which was laid out especially for him to walk upon alone, under the trees which he himself had planted, that he might see things develop which he had started. He lived this recluse life because he had no health to spare ; and he worked his way through the shivering illnesses, for they were illnesses of fever and successive chill, to achievements that must be amazing to any who study his life.

Consider for a moment his singular devotion to science itself. Science was to him a religion. He had passed gradually out of institutional religion to aspects of creation. Perhaps it does not matter what noble thing one takes for his religion, provided it be noble enough and absorb him wholly. There is no prescription for

CHARLES DARWIN

making gods, no tradition which tells you which gods are real; the sacramental devotion of a whole mind to a worthy task is a regenerating influence in life. "I never turned aside from my devotion to science," Darwin said. When Browning, at twenty-one, printed his first poem, "Pauline," that "fragment of a confession," his destiny was as much determined as though he had been cast in the mould of poetry and the product advertised for all time. So with Darwin; he was a scientist, *con amore*, sacramentally and "by the grace of God," and he never turned aside from that path. And we are the beneficiaries of his devotion.

Turn in this view now to his *Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*. When in 1858 Darwin made known his theory of the origin of species in a mere monograph or sketch, both the scientific and the professionally religious world stood aghast. For in it he gave his first intimation of views later expressed (1871) as to "the descent of man." This intimation he gave that he might not be accused of trying to con-

FROM POET TO PREMIER

ceal the road to which the *Origin of Species* pointed. He thus explains his motive: "Although in the *Origin of Species* the derivation of any particular species is never discussed, yet I thought it best, in order that no honorable man should accuse me of concealing my views, to add that by the work light would be thrown on the origin of man and his history." He had already published the narrative of the voyage of the "Beagle" from 1832 to 1836, in three volumes in 1839; the volume of *Researches into Natural History and Zoölogy* was published in 1845; *A Naturalist's Voyage*, in 1860. In 1839 a little treatise by Waterhouse with notes and comments by Darwin on the Mammalia had been published; a commentary by him on John Gould's "Birds" in 1849, "Fish and Reptiles" in 1843, and so on to the *Origin of Species* which came out in book form in 1859. That this book was unwelcome, history records; but that it was curiously and hungrily sought after, history also records. The whole edition was taken up on the first day of publication and five thou-

CHARLES DARWIN

sand copies in sixty days. Now what was the opposition? It arose in this country, for instance, among scientific men like Agassiz, who though believing in a "development" theory, was not prepared for the conclusions of Spencer, as to Evolution, to the working of which Darwin was so rapidly furnishing illustration; and when there was added *The Descent of Man* all people who had pride in their immediate family gasped. Such men as Joseph Hooker and Charles Lyell, the best equipped scientists of England, took Darwin's theories "with a grain of salt" (by way of simple disinfectant), took it with corrective associations in other fields of science. Their letters to Darwin and his replies are as remarkable for gentleness and reasonableness as for their scientific contents; they are essays upon the moral rights of inquiry by dissenting minds.

With the clergy it was different. They felt that the fairy story in Genesis about the origins of the world had been made unfit for the reading of children or childish minds. What had really hap-

FROM POET TO PREMIER

pened, or was about to happen, was that the fairy origins had enlarged from a volume of sacred poetry to a library of folklore, and the childhood of the world had repeated in every clime under heaven its story of "The Beginnings." "The baggage is at the risk of the passenger;" so we are free to treat of this matter, since a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, is now perhaps the most learned interpreter of these dreams of the dawn of life. J. G. Frazer of the university of poets has waved before our enchanted eyes *The Golden Bough* and restored for us "The Youth of the World." The Church no longer regards this matter in the old way; its wounds were inflicted with antiseptic accompaniments, so the poison was corrected.

Of course, here and there, men understood in that day that the publication of a book did not alter the procession of the planets; that the sidereal universe is unimpaired by the discovery of a mollusc on the coast of Patagonia; but for the most part the feeling was that the story of a super-

CHARLES DARWIN

natural state in which man came to be had been impaired by the discovery that man was never so good as now. When scientists compete to give honor to one another's discoveries man has already risen far above the cave dwellers, who struggled with each other for possession of a bone. As a matter of fact the *Origin of Species* had nothing to do with the origin of life; and it was the imagination of the clerics that turned this somersault backward and landed them in the Garden of Eden, — a small sacred enclosure of which our first parents were only tenants at will. Darwin's effort was to discover how the variations were to be accounted for by *natural selection*, by *environment*, by the stress of life; and when Herbert Spencer's challenge about the "survival of the fittest" fell on the startled ears of the Church, it was felt that a new terror had been added to life, and the worshippers changing their creed for anathemas immediately began to prove that they were *not* yet "fit."

Darwin's deference for humanity as it is is shown in the way in which he concludes

FROM POET TO PREMIER

his *Descent of Man*,—the story of humanity as it *was*: “We must, however, acknowledge, as it seems to me, that man, with all his noble qualities, with sympathy which feels for the most debased, with benevolence which extends not only to other men, but to the humblest living creature, with his godlike intellect which has penetrated into the movements and constitution of the solar system—with all these exalted powers—man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin.”

You must bear in mind that two things are beyond dispute; that the discussion of the “origin of species” is only an effort to determine why things behave in a given way, not how they came to be as life-forms, not whether the procession is materially complete in origin, or comes out as a great forming-line. The special act of creation is discounted in favor of a controlling principle of ceaseless creation. This much at least must be admitted, that the dignity of the universe has been enhanced when, for the mechanical structure

CHARLES DARWIN

which immediately fell into ruin, and has been for centuries in the repair shop, there was substituted a universe, vital in every part and enclosing in its lowest forms that creative energy which ever moves to the apotheosis of beauty and power. The theological inquiry does not enter into the question at all, it was a misunderstanding that dragged it into the discussion in the first place. When *The Descent of Man* appeared things of course became more serious, and the Church at once felt that it was justified in its first fright by the suggestion that the first man was “a hirsute animal of arboreal tendencies,” to quote Matthew Arnold the Churchman — not like Darwin a “believing sceptic,” but a “sceptic believer.” Between these terms might be written a whole volume of the history of mind ! But even *The Descent of Man* was not an inquiry into the origin of life. When it was discovered that our long-ago ancestors were the remote cousins of those who had not yet risen to our exalted state in which we had sacrificed the length of the lower jaw by building

FROM POET TO PREMIER

up the shell to house a better brain, the discovery gave rise to the vindictive perversion of the statement, — that man was “descended from the monkeys.” Bishops made crude jokes upon “our first parents in the zoölogical gardens,” and for a little while it seemed as though a sense of humor was likely to bring its saving grace to the advocates of total depravity. But when Charles Darwin and his fellow workers claimed blood-relationship between man and his simian cousins, they were still many millions of years away from the origin of things and by celestial diameters separated from any fears and prejudices that the religious man might properly entertain. People take fright at zoölogy and bacteriology under the impression that these sciences had something to do with the life of God and the communion of the soul with its great Original. Of course this trepidation has no ground, either in fact or philosophy as to the facts. The life of the human soul must be accounted for in terms of present experience. The last term in an ascending series takes

CHARLES DARWIN

the emphasis. A progressive revelation as to the life of man is to be judged by its outcome, not its origins. Darwin says: "The mystery of the beginning of all things is insoluble by us and I, for one must be content to remain an Agnostic."¹

Variations have been proposed and perfected, modifications imposed on the scientific mind; but *natural selection* under some form still accounts for the variations of sex and form and has held its way as a theory through all the mutations of the scientific mind. The true "blood-relationship," which at first was a happily chosen phrase, has become in modern scientific inquiry an exact statement of fact. The "blood reaction" which physiological chemistry shows has written a new page in the Book of Life and established undeniable claims upon the human family by our ancient relations who look down upon our pretenses from the branches of the forests of Asia.

One must inevitably in such a recital as this bring to mind the association of Dar-

¹ Life and Letters.

FROM POET TO PREMIER

win and Huxley. Huxley's admiration for Darwin was unbounded. He says: "He was a rare combination of genius, industry, and unswerving veracity; he earned his place among the most famous men of the age by sheer native power, in the teeth of a gale of popular prejudice." Huxley makes no claim to priority in his *Man's Place in Nature*, although in fact a tremendous contribution to the procession of life, and first of kin, by an elder birth, to Darwin's *Descent of Man*. The same spirit which moved Wallace toward Darwin is seen in the more aggressive temperament of Huxley. Huxley and Darwin working at the same *problema maximum*! Huxley, fiery, impetuous, eager for battle, contemptuous of a dull world, or energetically triumphing over it. Darwin calm, weighing every problem slowly, letting it mature thoroughly—not a fighter, yet having the greater and more lasting influence by virtue of his immense mass of critically sifted proofs. Darwin's friend, Huxley, was the first to do him justice, to understand his nature, and to find in it the reason why the detailed and carefully con-

CHARLES DARWIN

sidered book on *The Descent of Man* made its appearance so late. Huxley, always generous, never thought of claiming priority for himself. In enthusiastic language he tells how Darwin's immortal work, *The Origin of Species*, first shed light for him on the problem of *the descent of man*; the recognition of a *vera causa* in the transformation of species illuminated his thoughts as with a flash. He was now content to leave what perplexed him, what he could not yet solve, as he says himself, in the mighty hands of Darwin. Happy in the bustle of strife against old and deep-rooted prejudices, against intolerance and superstition, he wielded his sharp weapons on Darwin's behalf; wearing Darwin's armor, he joyously overthrew adversary after adversary. Darwin spoke of Huxley as his "general agent." Huxley says of himself, "I am Darwin's bull-dog" !¹

This estimate of twin giants, battling to deliver an unwilling world from the bonds of the past by showing it an immeasurably better future, is quoted from the tribute of

¹ Professor Schwalbe.

FROM POET TO PREMIER

Professor Schwalbe of the University of Strassburg, published in the preëminently important volume, *Darwin and Modern Science*, published by the University of Cambridge to commemorate the Centennial of Darwin's birth. This estimate of Darwin's doctrine of non-resistance to a militant opposition coincides with his own determined behavior. "I shall keep out of controversy and just give you my own facts." In calling attention to this resolution the Professor of Botany in Darwin's own University, Cambridge, adds this comment, quoting Hazlitt: "Where the pursuit of truth has been the habitual study of any man's life, the love of truth will be his ruling passion." Darwin himself declares: "It is a golden rule, which I try to follow, to put every fact which is opposed to one's preconceived opinion in the strongest light. Absolute accuracy is the hardest merit to attain, and the highest merit — any deviation is ruin."

What an irresistible example this "believing sceptic" has set to all men, who

CHARLES DARWIN

claim to believe. His soul sought the soul of things; with an intimacy less perfect he could not be satisfied. His poise was complete, his consecration without reserve, his confidence in the fidelity of Nature without fear; one is constantly reminded of "the meek who shall inherit the earth." He seemed the heir of all the treasures in the lap of Nature. He set the doctrine of evolution on the throne of the world of thought. For more than two thousand years men had been repeating the words "evolution," "development," "natural law," as magic terms to quiet their fears and rebuke the seeming catastrophes which interrupted their confidence in the reign of law. The thinking machine of the world had been preparing as the final product of milleniums of years of struggle; and, at last a man appeared who in a single lifetime rises above sickness of his own body, prejudice and disbelief in other minds, and teaches this thinking world its real function. Huxley's tribute uttered in 1885 may well close this survey:

FROM POET TO PREMIER

“Whatever be the ultimate verdict of posterity upon this or that opinion which Mr. Darwin has propounded; whatever adumbrations or anticipations of his doctrines may be found in the writings of his predecessors; the broad fact remains that, since the publication and by reason of the publication of *The Origin of Species* the fundamental conceptions and the aims of the students of living nature have been completely changed. . . . The impulse thus given to scientific thought rapidly spread beyond the ordinarily recognised limits of Biology. Psychology, Ethics, Cosmology were stirred to their foundations, and *The Origin of Species* proved itself to be the fixed point which the general doctrine of evolution needed in order to move the world.”

The lever of Archimedes had found its fulcrum not by discovering a point outside the earth, resting on which it should lift the world, but by the far more important discovery that there is no “outside” in this perfect whole and no estrangement between any of its parts.

The *Book of Life* is a palimpsest in which the ancient fable of a “special creation” has been obscured by a multitudinous record of the facts of nature; but when

CHARLES DARWIN

we turn to its title page and find there in golden letters the testimony of Cleanthes the Greek and Paul the Jew, “We are also His offspring!”

TENNYSON



TENNYSON

THE INTERPRETER OF LEGEND AND LIFE

THE biography of Tennyson, treated simply as biography, would be a matter almost commonplace, so uneventful was it; his real history is the history of a mind; so we shall come immediately to the study of that mind in order to reach what is of more signal importance. What a man does, where a man is, how a man seems, are the mere accidents of career; what a man *is*, especially if he be the organ of a spiritual inspiration or the instrument touched by a divine hand, is of prime importance. Tennyson therefore must be set against his background in order to bring him into proper relief. He was not so great a poet as Browning, but the next most signal example of his century after the first thirty years of it. The first thirty years of that century were immortalized by Shelley,

FROM POET TO PREMIER

Keats, and Byron; Shelley who has been called “that radiant and ineffectual angel beating his luminous wings in the void in vain!” Keats with his hectic cheek and his love-sick soul, sitting at the beautiful gate of the Temple of Life begging an alms of the pity of the world! and Byron, the corsair upon the seas of life and pirate of the affections!

After the first thirty years of the century in which Wordsworth ceased to write, in 1830, — for twenty years contemplating the shadow on his own mind—we have, as the most significant figure in this Victorian age, Alfred Tennyson. As to the background against which he is set, it was constituted by the Romantic School of English poetry which began in 1798 and closed in 1830. It had been chiefly composed of two groups of three poets in each group; Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Scott on the one side, the champions of the old order as against all revolutions political or social; Shelley, Keats, and Byron on the other, liberals and watchers for the dawn of another, if not a wholly better, day. To

TENNYSON

the first group we owe the inspiration which came through the French Revolution, not touching Scott nearly, but enthusing and inspiring Wordsworth and Coleridge. One cannot forget the day when those two sat under the rock by the sea, discussing in an academic way the evolution of mind in their period, and closely watched by the customs officials for fear they might be anarchists preparing for the invasion of England. Out of that conversation came "the lyric ballads," Coleridge contributing four and Wordsworth seventeen, to that little brown pamphlet which was — had the customs guard only known it — a veritable bringing of revolution, for it was to place the English mind at a quite new angle of vision. It created a new school in English poetry!

The second group I have already outlined. I suppose those who are acquainted with the earlier English poets of the nineteenth century might expect that I should mention Southey, but I never mention Southey if I can avoid it. Southey invites

FROM POET TO PREMIER

prejudice from Shelley's lovers because of his attitude towards Shelley, in which he attempted to be the critic of Shelley's motives and methods ; saying that "the only difference between them was that Shelley was eighteen and he was thirty-six," whereas the real difference was that of a celestial diameter, and because no reason has ever yet been discovered why Southey should have been made Poet Laureate. One can understand, perhaps, how Sir Alfred Austin came to be placed in that position, because there was nobody left after Morris had been disapproved and Swinburne found impossible and a few other true poets passed by in the interests of the great propriety of the Victorian age ; but for Southey there seems no excuse.

He was drowsing one day and "woke up"—not "famous," but Laureate! Mrs. Southey died, insane, in 1837. Two years later the poet married again and immediately began to sink into mental decay. The halo which appears about his head was placed there by those who remember his care of the wife and family of Coleridge.

TENNYSON

The interval between 1830 and the accession of Victoria in 1837 was singularly barren of pure literature. Southey was Poet Laureate until 1843, reporting births and deaths with a dull pen; and then Wordsworth took the crown of laurel and let it wither over a brain turned to ashes of old age, for he wrote nothing from 1830 to 1850 that was worth recording. When the young Queen came to the throne she looked out upon an era in which great things were promised and were beginning to offer themselves to a public as yet somewhat indifferent. Charles Lamb had written the last essay of Elia and died in 1834 — the same year in which Coleridge died, attended by John Sterling, as a living angel might bend above an urn of mortal dust. Browning wrote “Pauline” in 1833 and no one cared; a hundred copies were distributed by his father who was proud of him as a poet — one among many fathers who rest upon a fame they have, unknowing, created out of disappointment. “Paracelsus” followed in 1835 when Browning was twenty-three years old; then came

FROM POET TO PREMIER

“Strafford” in 1837, Browning’s attempt to join that great company of poets who have written plays that were not played, — a great drama but not a good play. In 1835 Tennyson’s poems appeared and received scant notice and for the most part faint praise, but in 1837 the great births of 1809 had begun to register themselves and make their impression, — Darwin, Tennyson, and Gladstone all began to be heard, and with Browning three years later, the Victorian period took possession between the years of 1837 and 1872 of a new inheritance of literature, which constituted an era not in the history of letters alone but in the history of human thought.

Before 1872 Browning’s most important work was done, though he continued to write to the day of his death. His “Aristophanes’ Apology,” and the “Dramatic Idylls” belonged to this period and show unabated force; but they had no great effect upon the public mind. Most of the work which distinguished Ruskin had already taken its place before 1872, and it is notable that in the “English Anthology”

TENNYSON

of Stedman there is but a single poem of Ruskin's; for he lit his poetic flame to burn without measure in his "Lamps of Architecture" and his other great works not versified though surely inspired. Then we come to that cold, meditative, impassive creature, Matthew Arnold, who, as early as 1851, left poetry and almost deserted criticism to become the controversialist of religious polemics and ecclesiastical debate; and in that field he was not effectual nor final; for when he reached the crisis of his contention he relaxed his effort and sat down on the high altar of his church and put his face in his hands to lament the inconsistency of stern fact with decent and ancient tradition. He mourned the sanctity of the Commonplace.

The remaining names in this brief survey belong distinctly to the later Victorian age. I speak of William Morris because he is essential to any discussion of Tennyson. Morris infinitely surpassed Tennyson—in his "Defence of Guenevere" for instance—in passion and power and poise and flight. The majority of Morris' work

FROM POET TO PREMIER

belongs to the last quarter of the century. There is another name,—I should think shame of myself if I omitted to speak of this Victorian background without mentioning James Thompson,—the drunkard, the sick man, the wanderer dying alone in the bedchamber of his blind poet friend, Sidney Dobell. He sent out no book until 1874 and then startled the world with his “City of Dreadful Night.” Two more members of the group there are—one of them still left to us; two who, until a little while ago, stood like two great strangely contrived pillars in the space between which all the former pictures have been removed,—George Meredith and Thomas Hardy,—with Rudyard Kipling moving between them, an uncertain quantity in the literary world. They three have much that is vital, and are present forces; but it is difficult to say that they belong wholly to the century I have been describing.

For Tennyson’s life, beginning in Somersby, Lincolnshire, August 6, 1809, and ending in 1892, there is the simplest outline necessary. His father was an English

TENNYSON

rector, which is to say that he was born into a home of culture; for the English rector of 1809 was by no means the same as the English rector of 1709. The great body of the English clergy, with whom Wesley and his colleagues had their struggle for a revived spirit in religion, had passed away, and in 1809 refinement and culture marked the English rector's home. We have little knowledge of the earlier education of Tennyson but we find that he went to Trinity College, Cambridge, the college of poets. He withdrew from the University on the death of his father, without having taken his degree. It is amazing how many of the men we are indebted to in the last fifty years of the Nineteenth Century, many of whom are still writing, are not college men. In conversation recently with one of the best known of these he named to me forty men of great literary achievement who had had no university training. It is accident, perhaps, but impressive as to the degree of originality that may be left in the mind that has not been ironed out by a college course.

FROM POET TO PREMIER

That Tennyson felt the splendid impulse toward destiny is shown by the fact that at college he and others had formed the society called "The Apostles." Many a man feels himself an apostle who is not willing to act as an evangelist. This group consisted of some of the most brilliant young men of England, among them Arthur Hallam who, in "In Memoriam," was the instance and illustration of the capacity of one man to love another. The name of this society is not insignificant. There was in Tennyson's mind the feeling of destiny. In Browning it was the determination to be a poet; in Tennyson it was the determination to say such things as a poet should say. Tennyson won the Chancellor's medal in 1829 with the poem called "Timbuctoo." From the moment he left the University, for the rest of his life, he hardly lifted his pen from paper or his thought from the destiny of men. That is a great career. In the poem "In Memoriam" we have an illustration of how sorrow shows what stuff a man is made of. I think there is no ground of comparison be-

TENNYSON

tween the "Adonais" of Shelley and "In Memoriam," because the "Adonais" was the fountain of sorrow which coursed its way through Shelley's mind in a single geyser-like eruption, and "In Memoriam" was fifteen years occupying Tennyson's mind, enlarging its shadow as one yew tree might be planted after another around a grave. No overwhelming sorrow could produce for over fifteen years without becoming philosophical. This poem is the philosophy of love's struggle with what seems to be the cruelty of nature; while the "Adonais" is a poem of beauty by one who strings his harp once to sing a song for all time. "In Memoriam" has been well called the English classic on the love of immortality and the immortality of love.

When Tennyson became Poet Laureate he made a noble opening of that career. He was fortunate in opening it with the "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" in 1852. Happy the Laureate who has not to make his beginning with the birth of a puling infant born out of the loins of a weak line of kings, but rather

FROM POET TO PREMIER

with an event whose reverberations lend themselves to echo and re-echo through all brave minds.

Then we come to the "Idylls of the King," the legends that come the nearest to being a Bible that the Anglo-Saxon language has produced. The Welsh legends, the Mabinogion, and the English legends of Arthur constitute our best effort toward making the scripture, which fact is constantly forgotten. We have had the Jew's Bible so long, both in the Old and the New Testament, that we have illustrated the ingratitude of peoples by hating the race whose ethical passion produced the things they borrowed. But, as I say, the Arthurian legends are our nearest approach to a scripture of our own. The underlying motive is the shadowing forth of the warfare of sense and the soul; and never have they been more beautifully dealt with in terms of religious culture than by Tennyson, or in terms of sense than by Morris. There is the difference between these two poets. You read Tennyson and rise better, you read Morris and rise delighted. Mor-

TENNYSON

ris is never so far from the earth even in his socialism (or fraternalism) as to forget the claims of sense. Swinburne floats between, a kind of radiant vapor. Morris is "of the earth earthy" in his figures, though he may at times rise to heights of spiritual elevation. I think the difference between Tennyson and Morris could not be better illustrated than by the refrain in Morris' poem introducing the "Earthly Paradise," where the poet speaks of himself as "the idle singer of an empty day." Tennyson was never that; Tennyson was the radiant prophet of a better day to come, and that marks the distinction between the two. Yet one would be sorry to lose out of the language that charming chant with which Morris begins the "Earthly Paradise." Dr. Van Dyke speaks of the "Idylls of the King" as representing movements in symphony, the theme of which is the ideal humanity, seeking to establish itself in a set reign of law, and constantly opposed in this effort by the disorderly and disintegrating elements of humanity not ideal. If Tennyson had not

FROM POET TO PREMIER

been so tied by tradition himself he would not have given ground quite for that comment, and if Dr. Van Dyke were as free, as I think he will be, he would have said, instead of "disorderly and disintegrating elements of humanity," "the wild tribes of the border that are constantly trying to dethrone the king"; because these things are not incident to human nature but are the unregenerated things that we have brought up from our lower nature out of the remote past. This struggle in the "Idylls" between sense and soul culminates when unlawful love between Launcelot and Guinevere wrecks the court.

To return to Tennyson's personal history, he was made Baronet Aldworth, a title derived from his home in Surry in the Isle of Wight. This baronetcy was conferred on him in 1884 and there are no other events to record until in 1892 he "crossed the bar."

In 1871 Tennyson was sixty-two years old. He had been Poet Laureate for fourteen years and his public works had massed large.

TENNYSON

In 1850 he had completed the "In Memoriam," the noblest threnody in the English language; and "The Idylls of the King," which had been thought out through many years, were supposed to be finished in 1869; but in 1871 "The Last Tournament" was published, and in 1872 "Gareth and Lynette," and still he seemed not satisfied; he had set himself the task of telling the story of conflict between sense and soul, and in such a story as that every new discovery opened a new chapter. When he had published "Gareth and Lynette" he seemed not satisfied that he had made the evil attendant upon the good sufficiently clear, and he added "Balin and Balan" and "Merlin and Vivien"; these again setting in contrast the evil and the good.

Let us for a moment inquire what Tennyson meant by the "Idylls of the King." "At twenty-four," he says of himself, "I meant to write a book or a poem of King Arthur and thought I should take twenty years about the work. They will now (in 1869) say I have been forty

FROM POET TO PREMIER

years about it. The 'Holy Grail' is one of the most imaginative of my poems." (When a man is preaching, telling the message that has been delivered to him, it is a little trying to have him tell what rank one particular message takes over the others he has delivered. Tennyson was always one of the people most interested in himself. We need hardly look on this as a defect. It is just a peculiarity, one of the things that come down through some strain of ancient blood.) "I have expressed there my strong feeling as to the reality of the unseen. At the end where the King speaks of his work, this is intended to be the summing up of all the highest in nature and the highest in himself."

Mr. Gladstone's tribute is just: "We know not where to look in history or in letters for a nobler or more overpowering conception of man as he might be than in 'Arthur.' Wherever he appears it is as the great pillar of the moral order and the resplendent top of human excellence."

Of course the general view at that time

TENNYSON

was that God was a sort of oriental sovereign sitting outside of the universe to watch it go, a kind of immeasurable clergyman—whom some of them took at the same time for the devil. Tennyson escaped from that mistake by which we blame our sorrows on to God and our sins on to some diabolical enemy of God and man.

He rises to a great spiritual eminence in “The Passing of Arthur”:

*“ And slowly answer’d Arthur from the barge :
‘ The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.*

.

*I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within himself make pure ! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by
prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy
voice*

*Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer*

FROM POET TO PREMIER

*Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God,
But now farewell.' "*

Tennyson goes on further about himself: "Yes, it is true that there are moments when the flesh is nothing to me, when I feel and know the flesh to be the vision and God and the spirit of God the only real and true." Now note how Browning treats that same thought. Tennyson says that God and the soul are the only essential, the only real. That is a commonplace of spiritual minds who know that there are only two words in religion, God and the soul. When Browning would deal with them apart he says: "He at least believed in soul, was very sure of God." Browning understood perfectly well that we are building bridges between these two all the time; we call these bridges by various names, philosophy of religion, history of the philosophy of religion, theology of our outlook, whatever it may happen to be; but all these things are simply the effort to put supports under the bridges between

TENNYSON

God and the soul. When the flesh comes in, when the basic instincts of human life are treated, Browning says we are "caught in this rose mesh of the flesh" and adds: "But flesh helps soul no less than soul helps flesh." Browning takes man as he is. Tennyson promotes man, treats him as separate from the encasement of his spiritual nature, treats him, in fact, as he never is. For man is always either "caught in the rose mesh of the flesh" or has become a ghost.

But Tennyson continues: "Depend upon it, the spiritual is the real; it belongs to one more than the hand and the foot; you may tell me my hand and my foot are only imaginary, symbols of my existence, but you never can convince me that the 'I' is not the eternal reality, and the spiritual not the real part of me." This is Tennyson's own statement and has great significance because it is the essential and final truth with regard to human life. Everything else is instrument or organ; but the musician is not the organ, the scientist is not the instrument; the organ limits the

FROM POET TO PREMIER

musician's power and the instrument limits the scientist's inquiry; but the two are not to be confused in any sane mind. "These words," says his son, referring to this utterance of Tennyson, "he spoke with such passionate earnestness that a solemn silence fell on us as he left the room."

As to the significance of the idylls Tennyson says: "Of course, Camelot, the city of shadowy palaces, is symbolical of human belief and institutions and the spiritual development of man." Now there I find myself lost, I confess, because when you remember the Lady of Shalott, how weary she was of "shadows"; how she wove the picture of the world that she saw on the mirror into the texture that she worked; how she saw Launcelot go by with his gleaming spurs and jingling bridle reins; and how she went down and laid herself in the little bark and "floated down to Camelot," *dead*; how Launcelot saw her and said "she hath a lovely face"—Launcelot, the very embodiment of the forces in life that know only the texture of the flesh,—when

TENNYSON

you remember all these things, you can hardly find it consistent that this maiden, dead of weariness, could float down, unconscious, to Camelot, if that was "the growing institution and organization of the spiritual life." The fabric does not hang together. If a living lady of Shalott, as sinful as you please, not weary, but worn out, not watching the shadows pass, but herself *passée* in all the fine instincts of her life,—if she had lain prone in the shallop and floated down to Camelot, to the institutions of religion, she would have found them dead and no help to her; she would have come to the city of the dead if they were the institutions of life; for it is the fact that sinful people who need them vitalize them for their needs, and good people vitalize them for people who need them. I cannot understand Camelot that way. "Yet there is not a single fact or incident in the idylls," he says, "however seemingly mystical, which cannot be explained without mystery or allegory." "I hate," he says, "to be tied down to say this means that." There are always people who

FROM POET TO PREMIER

want to know what this or that means; who want to know who sat for the picture, and the relation of the painter to the model! When a student of Browning visited Browning he asked him, what he had always wanted to know, what was meant by "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came"; and Browning answered, "I don't quite remember. I had an old tapestry with a gaunt white horse in it and I had seen a squat tower somewhere in Normandy, and they came together in my mind." Then the Browning Pilgrim wanted to tell Browning what *he* thought it meant. People always want to do that; they always want to penetrate the disguise of great people. And he said: "Does it not mean that he that endureth to the end shall be saved?" and Browning replied, "Yes, about that." But a poet does not like, as Tennyson says, "to be tied down to say this is that," or that is so. How should he, when by turning thought over in his mind it gathers ever like a snowball an increasing form? Thought has the power of self-reproduction, so that the thing that

TENNYSON

last was born may not be at all the same that first was promised.

One word as to Wordsworth and Tennyson as moral teachers. Wordsworth was the more intentional moral teacher because he desired only to be remembered as an ethical teacher, but he was also the freer of the two. The traditions of religion in Wordsworth were held in obedience to the commands of reality. Tennyson ran small risk of seeming unorthodox to the English mind. Wordsworth was early called a Pantheist. Where Tennyson thought his way through, Wordsworth went by spiritual gravitation. In neither did ethics find its bravest expression. Verse was the accidental conveyance of Wordsworth's teaching. He started out to interpret the common life, especially country life, as being nearest Heaven in its expression and thought. Tennyson never gave this common life his real thought. He was a democrat in thought and an aristocrat in fact. He was always trying to get down to the common people in his statements, but he came from the

FROM POET TO PREMIER

height of class exclusiveness in terms of democracy. There was the difference between Tennyson and Wordsworth, — Wordsworth infinitely greater in moral power; Tennyson so concerned with the trappings of his poetic state that he would have scorned to write so simple a thing as Wordsworth's "Matthew." And yet there is power in Tennyson — power deserving of reverence and admiration. But Wordsworth weaves in a hand loom, while Tennyson superintends the machinery of a great industry. Wordsworth never fails of poetic power; Tennyson has fifteen per cent of false rhymes to Browning's one per cent. And yet Tennyson was the most accomplished versifier of the century. He was like a pianist with a wonderful technique, who every now and then strikes the false note or whose instrument may have a bad string. I speak of these things because we are so much in the habit of taking the common opinion about a poet and letting it go at that; but opinion is the attendant upon fact in life.

The plays of Tennyson do not "play."

TENNYSON

They are dramatic situations of limited dramatic action. Some of those who attempted to conduct the education of the people have testified as actors to the poet's instinct as an actor; "being willing," said Mary Anderson, "to sacrifice his most beautiful lines for the sake of a real dramatic effect." But Tennyson himself complains: "Critics are so exacting now-a-days that they not only expect a poet-playwright to be a first-rate author, but a first-rate manager, actor, and audience all in one." But the answer of the critic to this complaint is: If a man is going to write for all the people, he must know how all the people feel. They may not feel the right thing rightly; but they have chosen the theater as their expression of emotional life; and the playwright makes his choice between gaining their approval or conducting their education. Tennyson knew men in groups and sections of society; his democracy was sentimental, his class-association was actual. The one kind of humanity he knew, another kind *he knew of*. He desired the good of all: but

FROM POET TO PREMIER

he understood the condition of a certain few.

What Shakespeare did, Tennyson hoped he might approximately do, and thus worthily complete the master's interrupted work: but the public were never convinced of the dramatic succession. A certain measure of success must attach to the dramas when Irving, Miss Terry, and other great histrionic personalities took on the costumes of Tennyson's characters. The great actor moved us, not his thin disguise; when all has been said for the beauty of the lines, the poet's skill in lyric verse is not supported by his power in dramatic art. Few passages there are the reading of which kindles the mind and quickens the pulse; but in the lyric poetry and the "Idylls" such an effect is constant; in the dramas it is occasional.

For instance, Tennyson, when sixty-six years old, offers to the dramatic world "Queen Mary." But for the most part it is an essay on England in the period of the struggle for Roman Catholic dominion in England. It is dramatic almost solely

TENNYSON

from the picture of Mary's abject devotion to Philip, set against the background of his religious superstitions. Her character is portrayed in terms which are strong because informed by unregulated passion, but such scenes are overlaid and lose vividness in the tedious discourses of the speakers, — essays upon State-craft and religion are unwieldy freight for a tide of passion to carry to the footlight. Doubtless these dramas, "Queen Mary," "Harold," and "Becket" were, in their author's mind, contributions to the dramatic story of "the making of England." He may have justified himself in remembering the long speeches in "Julius Cæsar" and "Henry the Eighth," but the power of a play to sustain such discourse depends not on the length of the lines but in the lift of the play. The critics of the Elizabethan period thought Ben Jonson and Webster greater than Shakespeare, but a later age keeps Shakespeare on the stage and his contemporaries on the library shelf labelled "The Dramatists of the Age of Elizabeth."

FROM POET TO PREMIER

Among these Tennysonian dramas, "Becket" received high praise from the historians. J. R. Green, who transformed the study of English history, declares that all his researches in the annals of the twelfth century had not given him "so vivid a conception of the character of Henry II. and his court as was embodied in Tennyson's "Becket." But here the true office of poet and historian unite to make the ancient channel-ways of a people's life run with a fresh current of human interest. The play was published in 1879 and refused by Irving, though he called it a "finer play than King John"; that he reconsidered the possibility of its production in 1891, the year before Tennyson died, is perhaps not so much due to a "change in public taste," as Mr. Irving claimed, as that the actor was twelve years more famous and had discovered in Ellen Terry a personality to sustain the interest in the part of Rosamund.

Three years earlier Tennyson had published "Harold," which he called his "Tragedy of Doom." The term was well

TENNYSON

chosen for, like the great dramas, it is the story of the irrevocable fate which waits upon the Eternal Law, "My tongue has sworn but my soul has not sworn!" in both the plays, and that of Euripides, which marks the conscious innocence which cannot evade the cost and which casuistry cannot explain or cause to be forgotten. The doom of the defiled cannot be escaped, even by "the pure in heart; *they shall see God*"; but they must also "*front the Doom of God*"! It is the age-old problem of Job: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." But when the highest reach of poetic rapture and the deepest search of philosophic meaning is to be expressed by Tennyson, we turn not to the dramas but the more facile vehicle of the lyric verse, and confess, with a capable critic, that "those who would lift Lord Tennyson in drama to the level of his great reputation are doing a sorry service to the greatest poet of our time."

I cannot discuss at length the great

FROM POET TO PREMIER

poem "In Memoriam." It is the most quoted great poem in the English anthology, and it is a proof of its greatness that we always remember it, and a tribute to the common mind that it has become a household word. How constantly those who know little else as Tennyson's repeat under life's stress:

*"O, yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill."*

That "yet" implies in Tennyson the effort of years to interpret love in spite of the seeming cruelty of nature, the long passage of experience culminating in the leaning of the soul upon the conviction that

*"good shall fall
At last — far off — at last, to all."*

"Our little days" are so little in the long procession of eternities, so few in the thought of the Being with whom a single day is "as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Then he goes on through the whole argument of the fifteen years through which he wrote, to that "New

TENNYSON

Year" in which the bells were to "ring out the old, ring in the new," until he reaches the apotheosis of his thought in the "Introduction," the last part of the great elegy, written in 1849. The date affixed points to the prologue as in fact a sequel. Here speaks the triumphant issue of his conflict! The humanity that is in God appeals to him, the sense that nature may after all be a conscious personality and the universe instinct with meaning because it is instinct with soul, so he addresses himself to that humanity in God:

*“ Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove.*

.

*“ We have but faith : we cannot know,
For knowledge is of things we see ;
And yet we trust it comes from thee,
A beam in darkness : let it grow.*

*“ Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell ;
That mind and soul, according well,
May make one music as before,*

“ But vaster.”

FROM POET TO PREMIER

Thus the cry is ever for “more light”! The conviction is rooted in the affections where sorrow is also planted with deep roots. But the triumphant tone grows out of the discovery that sorrow shall also bloom if it be set in the full radiance which comes from on high.

Tennyson’s last poem, “Crossing the Bar” is his valedictory; it has been the subject of somewhat foolish criticism; criticism on such a subject is not necessarily silent, but it should be intelligent. There are people who say that they do not understand how the poet could speak of seeing his pilot “face to face” when going out to sea. The ship which went out to sea is, at close, coming into the harbor; the pilot is coming out to guide him in to “the haven where he would be”; he starts out from this shore, not native to the voyager, and ends at home; he has come in from the stormy ocean of temporal affairs and is going over the bar with the pilot into the quiet of Eternal Life. This poem, so pitiful, so brave, so wrapped up with the divinest affections, was the most fitting close for all

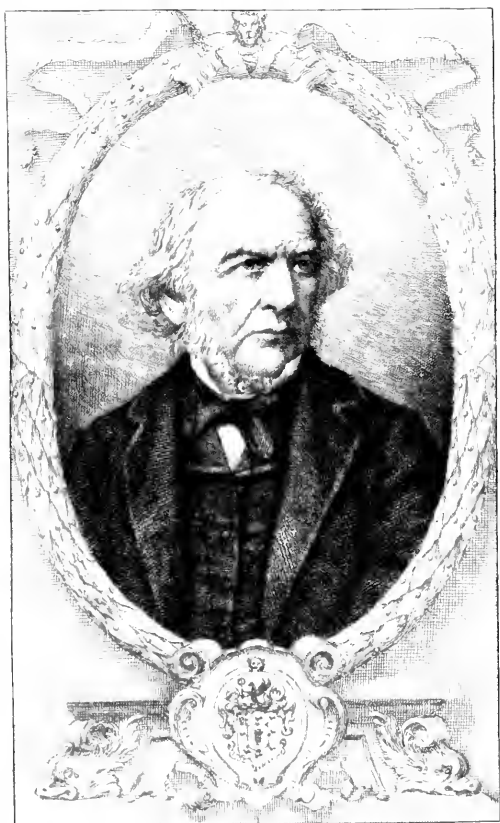
TENNYSON

his teachings and it may well close any consideration of the life and thought of Alfred Tennyson:

- “ *Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me !
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,*
- “ *But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.*
- “ *Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark !
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark ;*
- “ *For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.”*



GLADSTONE



GLADSTONE

THE GREAT COMMONER

WHEN we remember that the public career of William Ewart Gladstone covered an area of sixty years, that his age was one year short of ninety years (1809-1898), and that in his career, not his public service alone, but his private studies have to be taken into account, that he was a man who approached a subject first religiously, then morally, and then politically so far as his public career was concerned, the summary of what he *was* is a better starting point than the analysis of what he *did*. One hardly knows where to begin the story of his life, for it is the drama of a mind. Eton and Oxford, of course! Eton with a record of distinguished scholarship, and graduating from Oxford with "a double first"; designed from the beginning as the coming man of

FROM POET TO PREMIER

England politically, with a place [for his occupancy in the House of Commons, early selected by the Tory party. This Tory beginning is noted because it sets forth by a singular example the evolution of thought in Gladstone's mind. It seems strange to find him representing in the beginning, for the purposes of absolute conservatism, such a constituency. Oxford having refused him—one might say having dismissed him from representing his University in the House of Commons—Newark took him up, in order that he might defend the opinions, which afterwards he learned not simply to dislike but to treat with actual horror. Human slavery, political oppression, Bulgarian atrocities,—all are ranged together as the things to be hit hard in the career of Gladstone, not so much as party-issues as evils about which moral and sane men should have no debate. On entering the House of Commons he was called to debate the issue of the right and wrong of slavery, for he entered that body before England achieved the emancipation of her slaves in the West

GLADSTONE

Indies, before Brazil had made her experiment in gradual emancipation, and before the United States had cut with the stroke of a pen the terrible bond which held America to the ancient wrong. The constituency for which he stood not only represented the Duke of Newcastle's interests which procured his election, but the young member's own grandfather was a slave owner having large estates in the West Indies.

One can remember when in this country the argument that Gladstone used was taken as a stock argument in extenuation of human slavery, appealing to scripture as proof of the equity and ethics of the relation of the slave to the owner and the owner to the slave. It seems strange that a man of Gladstone's power should have sought to appeal to Holy Scripture in a matter of this kind, saying that "what scripture regulated, it certainly approved." Lincoln's short and easy method is in contrast: "No man is great or wise enough to own another man!" That is almost a humorous use of argument in so great a

FROM POET TO PREMIER

man dealing with so great a cause. From the infallibility of the scripture Gladstone drew his arguments; for of its inerrancy he never had any doubt. It has been said of him that he had an open mind, with edges turned down; and under those edges were some things that never showed,—among those things the infallibility of the scripture. Surely the study of history should have proved—*did prove*—the correction of economic eccentricity! In spite of all his study of Homer and Dante, he still could not resist the one tradition of his English training, which made the scriptures a kind of reserve, a sort of arsenal from which to draw the weapons of his conflict, and to be guarded as a *magazine*, in which with elements of power were also associated possibilities of danger. He could scarcely make an argument in the House of Commons without drawing illustrations from that source. That he should have spoken on slavery without attacking it, as he attacked the misrule of Ireland, the Bulgarian atrocities, the conditions of prisons in Naples—as he attacked every-

GLADSTONE

thing he believed iniquitous; that he should even have posed as an apologist of slavery, is an inconsistency to a later view, and, happily, the inconsistency of a man able to rise above and to correct it. All this was of short duration. It is interesting to note the way in which this Toryism of his early life disappears, as the fog disappears in the sun; and his Liberalism in later time was so pronounced that the transition from this earlier state was, after a while, almost entirely forgotten.

Mr. Morley, always analytical, always philosophical, eloquently states this process of evolution from advocate to statesman, seen in Mr. Gladstone's long and absorbingly interesting career:

“It is true that what interests the world in Mr. Gladstone is even more what he was than what he did; his brilliancy, charm, and power; the endless surprises; his dualism or more than dualism; his vicissitudes of opinion; his subtleties of mental progress; his strange union of qualities never elsewhere found together; his striking unlikeness to other men in whom great and free nations have for long periods placed their trust. . . . Some may

FROM POET TO PREMIER

think in this connection that I have made the preponderance of politics excessive in the story of a genius of signal versatility, to whom politics was only one interest among many. . . . Yet, after all, it was to his thoughts, his purposes, his ideals, his performances as statesman, in all the widest significance of that lofty and honorable designation, that Mr. Gladstone owes the lasting substance of his fame. His life was ever '*greatly absorbed,*' he said, '*in working the institutions of his country.*' Here we mark a signal trait. Not for two centuries, since the historic strife of Anglican and Puritan, had our island produced a ruler in whom the religious motive was paramount in the like degree. He was not only a political force but a moral force. He strove to use all the powers of his own genius and the powers of the state for moral purposes and religious. Nevertheless, his mission in all its forms was action. He had none of that detachment, often found among superior minds, which we honour for its disinterestedness, even while we lament its impotence in result."

That is true as eulogy, but it is also true as limitation. Gladstone never quite rose above the idea,—he was untouched by the answer of modern science to the idea that in some way the Ruler of human affairs was "a great Oriental Sovereign

GLADSTONE

set outside the universe to watch it go," and he was impressed with the conviction that he was the interpreter of the decrees of this oriental sovereign; that in temporal power there was a distinct effort of a will marching with this divine will, and that all this was a plan of the intentional will of God, which intention the premier of England had discovered. That was his limitation.

You remember the controversy that was waged over the infallibility of the scripture begun with Bishop Colenso, coming out of the jungle of Africa to further enlighten what was supposed to be the shining sun of the Church of England. He was tried gently by the Court of Arches and gently acquitted. Mr. Gladstone was untouched by these critical questions, or relegated them to moments less absorbed and not open to conviction as to the infallibility of scripture. This conception of the world shows the mediæval character of Gladstone's mind. It was a modern mind with large collections of mediæval material, through which moved a primitive power,

FROM POET TO PREMIER

not of selection, but of Titanic impulse. This lesson in tolerance challenges the very beginning of the consideration of his career. Because a mind does not deal impersonally with the world is no reason why we should insist on our sharp distinctions being entertained by that mind, which is, in other things, vastly instructed.

Gladstone is an illustration of the kind of man who most prides himself on the things of which he knows least. He was a *poet of the exchequer*, capable of making the figures in arithmetic figures of speech, and of exalting the radical financial considerations of the business of government into the bloom of rhetoric; yet his pride was not in these things but in his knowledge of Greek, in his Homeric studies, his ability, with sledge-like blows, to reduce the assumptions of the Vatican decrees, his book on that subject vying with his most popular publication. Eighty thousand copies were disseminated!

The Vatican decrees were interesting; it was interesting to note how Rome went back to the infallibility of the Pope, to the

GLADSTONE

immaculate conception of the Mother of God, and made decrees with regard to the Church at that late date, as one would build a new dam inside an old one that was falling into decay. This was interesting, certainly; but that it could so interest Gladstone in the very midst of the controversy on the reforms for Ireland pending in the House of Commons; that he should rather hail the dissolution of Parliament and his own retirement from office as an opportunity to pursue these academic questions, is somewhat surprising. In his study he kept one desk devoted to politics, one to literature, one to religion, and one to Mrs. Gladstone; and that room is a picture of his mind. One is reminded of Mr. Huxley's acid utterance: "The time had come when an English Bishop had learned that a man could not keep contradictory opinions in water-tight compartments in the same mind." Mr. Gladstone understood the combination which could open all these compartments in his mind, but his Cabinets and large numbers of the English people confessed their

FROM POET TO PREMIER

inability to enter into its secret processes. Somebody wrote to him, and the words were true: "You have so lived and written that you have kept the soul alive in England." When he died Lord Salisbury said of him that "he was a great Christian." Diplomacy was not his instrument so much as his compelling convictions. It was this quality which led Mr. Forster, in opposing him in the House of Commons to say: "The right honorable gentleman can persuade most people of most things; he can persuade himself of almost anything." He must often have used to himself the language of Wordsworth: "Earth is sick and heaven is weary of the hollow words that states and kingdoms utter when they talk of truth and justice."

The truth and justice of his own career were constantly impugned. I suppose no lion at bay ever heard more yelping packs upon his trail than did Gladstone. He had to meet the vitriol of Disraeli's sarcasm, the refined cynicism of Balfour, the Irish slogan translated into billingsgate. He was, perhaps, the most abused man and

GLADSTONE

the most loved man in England. When the contest of Midlothian came to him, at seventy years of age, he made his campaign and vindicated his Scottish ancestry, simply wringing out of the hands of the representative of the local interests his place in the House of Commons, as a man might go back from an ovation to the leadership of England, as to a task only intermitted for a little while. He was a knightly antagonist; he was also an antagonist of unflagging patience. He tempered no blow, nor stayed his hand; but he was not much concerned to cover either his own head or heart from assaults.

That champion of the people, John Bright, was discovered by Mr. Gladstone in the very van of opposition to his Home Rule plan for Ireland. That Mr. Bright should so confront his old colleague and do great battle against him, seemed to Mr. Gladstone difficult to explain, but to constitute no reason for moderation in his own rush forward to the great conflict! And this indefatigable courage appeared not only in the notable struggles of the Parlia-

FROM POET TO PREMIER

ment of 1880--85, but also, when the change of the reins of government from the hands of Mr. Gladstone to the hands of Lord Salisbury was made; the fatigue of the champion of Home Rule was easily relieved by a few months of Italy, perhaps, indeed, by sight of the deeper hurt and wider wounds displayed in southern Europe to such a discerning eye as Mr. Gladstone's. When the new session had well advanced, Mr. Gladstone, now leader of the Opposition, appeared; eighty years of age, with "eye undimmed and natural force unabated," he pointed to the dishonored grave in which it was hoped might be decently interred what was left of the case against Mr. Parnell, — that grave instead of ministerialist hopes, — to make an end of Home Rule. And in the midst of these questions which shook the very foundations of English rule, after advising against Parnell's continued leadership of the Irish party (although Mr. Gladstone had risen in the House among those who stood to welcome the Irish Leader's return from the vain inquisition of the Parnell

GLADSTONE

Commission), Mr. Gladstone, now octogenarian, is found struggling with hands strong, to tear away “the bar which fends off Roman Catholics from the Woolsack and from the Lord Lieutenancy of Ireland.” So has his sense of justice risen above dogmatism; and England’s *noblesse oblige* has seemed to him the answer to all quibbles and prejudices. Samson is too great and strong to use his strength for any end except the welfare of England. To create was more than to protest. This “almost last remnant of religious intolerance left in the statute book” was an offense to the great partisan of Protestantism; for it intruded an artificial barrier between patriots and their share in the offices and responsibilities of patriotism. One who was present on that memorable occasion thus comments upon the scene:

“As Mr. Gladstone rose the House was crowded. He spoke for an hour and ten minutes with an ease, a fullness of voice, a dignity of tone, and a strength of argument which charmed the House, if it did not convince the majority. It was a speech that, had it been the single effort of a lifetime,

FROM POET TO PREMIER

would have established a Parliamentary reputation. Coming incidentally in the course of a session, a sort of recreation on an off-day in a strenuous campaign, it was a marvellous achievement for an octogenarian, and, for a while, dissipated any lingering idea that Mr. Gladstone, weary of the long fight, weighted under his load of years, was sighing for rest."

So far from having shot his last bolt, three years later (1892) saw Mr. Gladstone again Premier of England, bringing to the office not simply his eighty-three years of a hale old age, but the abundant fruits of these many years as well. And his inevitable gravitation toward a liberalism which he had come to love with his whole heart, and which he yearned to see authorized beyond dispute ere he himself found the Great Emancipation, was evident when on St. Valentine's day (1893), by a happy coincidence, as it must have seemed to the sentimental Irish, the Premier rose to introduce the first bill of the session—his veritable lover's missive—"a *Bill for the better Government of Ireland.*"

It was the beginning of seven months'

GLADSTONE

struggle to pass the Home Rule measure in a parliament almost barren of other results. The House of Commons registered its will finally, and turned the bill over to the Lords, in September, 1893. That body, having abundant practice in rejecting reform measures, promptly threw out the measure, and so doomed the conscientious and devoted services of the aged Premier and his colleagues to an easy failure. "The Lords" illustrate the ancient scripture which proclaims that between "one day and a thousand years" there is no appreciable difference under certain unchanging conditions. Thus once more "the Divine Right" of the Upper House asserted itself.

This completed another chapter in the history of the conflict between ideas and traditions. The weary old statesman turned to the concluding tasks of his long and splendid career. The immortality of his fame was assured. "He worshipped leaning upon the top of his staff!" The House of Lords turned to its interrupted task of mixing the ingredients for its

FROM POET TO PREMIER

final dissolution, which by implication the Premier had already prophesied. The determination to live forever may be the certain overthrow of immortality. There is a difference: to be everlasting is not necessarily to be eternal!

Gladstone came upon an age which he himself calls "an agitated age." Consider the conditions which confronted him as an antagonist upon the Liberal side. The House of Lords is a very natural expression of the English method of government, — the assertion by the governing body under the constitution of England of the rights of a privileged class. But when you remember that Gladstone was promoting that very reform in which privilege should welcome democracy; that often the reforms of Disraeli were simply the culmination of the plans matured during previous administrations; and that there was in the House of Lords a perfectly united conservative element of the Lords-Bishop who, from the year of Gladstone's birth, up to twenty years ago, had almost, without exception, voted unanimously against

GLADSTONE

every movement of reform, you will realize some of the Liberal Leader's difficulties. It was not because they were bishops that they thus opposed changes, but because they were set as "shepherds of the people," who must not cultivate wolf-pups which might grow up to show their teeth. So that they unanimously voted down all reforms that often seemed good, lest they should turn out to be bad; they would take no chances as to the future of England except the chances of decay. Heaven had appointed them regents in the interval of a suspended Providence and they meant to be faithful unto death!

Disraeli, returning to power in 1874, managed after six years to bequeath to Gladstone on his return in 1880 the Egyptian question, which is still in debate. Lord Cromer's book, one of the most interesting and enlightening recitals of English rule in Egypt, is even now being quite rigorously held up to divergent opinion; the English mind is still divided between admiration of Cromer's administration, which took Egypt bankrupt and

FROM POET TO PREMIER

left it able to pay its way, and disapproval of that administration, as an exploitation of the Egyptian people. It is still an unsettled controversy: Did England "spoil the Egyptians," or did it preserve Egypt? Not only this question did Disraeli leave to Gladstone, but also the war of the Soudan; the complications of South Africa that resulted in the Boer War; the Irish agitation and Parnell's leadership in the House of Commons,—an almost unsurmountable complexity of problems, through which Gladstone found his way when possible, and cut his way when necessary.

It seems to us almost inconceivable that fifty years ago no Dissenter, whatever his rank or achievements, could take his degree in an English University, because he could not subscribe to the "Thirty-nine Articles." One of the most distinguished preachers in this country came here leaving congenial associations behind him in Trinity College, Cambridge, and received an honorary degree at Harvard in lieu of what he should have taken by merit at Cambridge, and was denied simply be-

GLADSTONE

cause he could not subscribe to the "Thirty-nine Articles." This is now "ancient history" of a rather recent date, so rapidly has liberality won its way.

It is to Disraeli that we owe many of the *bon mots* about the people of his time. There is a memorable one about Gladstone which Cardinal Manning records. When Cardinal Manning was referring to Gladstone's attitude in his later life and regretting his earlier conservatism, Disraeli said: "You surprise me, I thought he had always been an Italian in the custody of a Scotchman." That was inexcusably bitter. Morley thinks the better form, as corresponding more nearly with the facts, "A Highlander in the custody of a Lowlander."

Reference has been made to the knightly quality of Mr. Gladstone. There was a fine flavor of honor running through his administration because of his chivalrous essential self. For instance; some one declared that Gladstone had placed his son, ordained in 1870, in one of the richest and easiest livings in England, that of

FROM POET TO PREMIER

Hawarden, the parish about the Gladstone home. Gladstone might well have passed over such an obviously unfair accusation, but he was concerned about his reputation in these matters, and he replied that "this easy living entailed the charge of eight thousand people scattered over eighteen thousand acres and fast increasing in numbers. . . . The living is not the gift of the Crown. I did not present him to the living or recommend him to be presented. He was not ordained in 1870. My relations have no special cause to thank me for any advice given by me to the sovereign in the matter of church patronage." This seems equivalent to the naturalist's reply to the student who said: "A crab is a red animal which walks backward." "Excellent, correct in every particular," said the Master, "except that it is not an animal, is not red, and does not walk backward." As a whole the English are quite awake to the realization that Gladstone is entirely removed from any possible charge of nepotism. He had one son a rector, one son in business, a daughter who married a school-

GLADSTONE

teacher, and another who was a school mistress herself and became the head of Newnham College; one son only in politics, to whom was given by his all-powerful father the lowest possible place in the Cabinet. This sort of thing went through the record of Gladstone's life and is one of the distinctions for delicacy which we must honor in his career.

To tell in detail the story of the Irish struggle which has only been here summarized, would be to tell of struggles like that of Wellington and Waterloo. In the beginning a single representative stood for "better government in Ireland," and the contest continued until the exclusion of thirty-seven members from the House of Commons marked at once the bitterness of opposition and the growth of the sense of justice. Here was seen more nearly a crisis in the English government than anything probably since the time of the Commonwealth and the accession of Charles the Second. When we remember that assassination was the order of the day in Ireland, that evictions reached within a

FROM POET TO PREMIER

single year between two and three thousand, that people were on the moor without means of sustenance or shelter, that every atrocity was being perpetrated on both sides, you get some insight into the causes of this outbreak in the House of Commons.

Perhaps this part of a brief sketch of Mr. Gladstone may best be closed with a quotation from a speech by Mr. Chamberlain in 1885 :

“ I sometimes think that great men are like mountains and that we do not appreciate their magnitude while we are still close to them. You have to go to a distance to see which peak it is that towers above its fellows, and it may be that we shall have to put between us and Mr. Gladstone a space of time before we shall know how much greater he has been than any of his competitors for fame and power.”

Of Gladstone's personal charm I have hardly spoken. A little story will illustrate it. When John Morley was here, several years ago, a little group, of which he was the guest of honor, was chatting familiarly after dinner. One of the com-

GLADSTONE

pany, carried away by the freedom of conversation, said, "I suppose, Mr. Morley, when your party comes into power you will bring forward your education bill?" Mr. Morley did not reply to him, as to the subject of the question, but said with infinite courtesy: "That reminds me of a little thing that happened when I was in Mr. Gladstone's Cabinet. It was quite a crisis in the government, and as you may remember I was a member of the Cabinet. On one occasion Robert Browning brought in an American friend of his who, *apropos* of nothing and quite innocently, said to Mr. Gladstone: 'I suppose you will resign and not dissolve?' And Mr. Gladstone without the slightest show of resentment said: 'That is a subject which I feel bound to mention first to the House of Commons.'" Nothing could be more admirable than that use of conscious kindness and power by which a blunderer is made aware of his mistake without the least discourtesy or unkindness. One is reminded of the Vizier who was beheaded and did not know that his executioner had

FROM POET TO PREMIER

completed his task until the victim sneezed, and his head fell off! This charm of Mr. Gladstone was recognized by his associates, not simply as compelling their admiration, but provoking their imitation. Good manners became popular in debate; one might expect, had the Premier lived a half century more, to have seen good will added to good manners. Disraeli almost learned to be sincere, and Mr. Balfour to be frank and simple; Parnell at times seemed upon the verge of trusting his opponents; and Lord Randolph Churchill, on occasion, approached a diffident behavior. Sir Vernon Harcourt, in his admiration for grace in the Premier, affected curves to which his figure was ill-adapted; and over all the din of battle rose the melody of the Gladstonian tones which made the shrill squeak of party excitement wish it had practised in private upon a lower register more mellifluous notes before being betrayed to public discord.

How much of Mr. Gladstone's influence depended upon his magic eloquence, both of matter and manner, cannot be absolutely

GLADSTONE

determined. Much in Mr. Gladstone's make-up would seem to so ruthless an antagonist of tradition as Mr. Huxley, for instance, both unnecessary and artificial, but the impact of such a character is overmastering. When Huxley met Gladstone casually at Mr. Darwin's he was profoundly impressed with his essential greatness. "I should like to know," said Huxley, "what would keep such a man as that back. Why, put him in the middle of a moor, with nothing in the world but his shirt, and you could not prevent him being anything he liked." It was the *total man* which pressed for attention. Where he was at all he was altogether! would be a summary of this impression. He may have had "the greatest intellect in Europe," as one of his opponents said, and yet his greatest biographer and close companion declares that "half his genius was labor." When he came to the defense of a position, like that of Bradlaugh, his abhorrence of the infidel obstinacy of the avowed atheist, and the illogical maintenance of a negative, made all the more

FROM POET TO PREMIER

admirable the effort to enter sympathetically into Mr. Bradlaugh's mental state. His speech upon the Affirmation Bill both Mr. Bryce and Mr. Morley, who heard it, declare to have been wonderfully effective. This speech Mr. Morley describes as "imposing, lofty, persuasive, sage. It was signal, indeed, as coming from one so fervid, so definite, so unfaltering in a faith of his own, one who had started from the opposite pole to that great civil principle of which he now displayed a grasp invincible. These high themes of faith on the one hand, and freedom on the other, exactly filled the range of the thoughts in which Mr. Gladstone lived." It was the proof in terms both of protest and instruction—quoting from the sceptic Lucretius' rolling hexameters, an *apologia* for the unpoetic and crude doubts of Bradlaugh—that Mr. Gladstone had made the greatest change which can come over any mind: "I was brought up," he said to Mr. Morley in 1891, "to distrust and dislike liberty; I learned to believe in it. That is the key to all my changes!" This is equivalent to

GLADSTONE

that tremendous mental growth manifested when one who thinks he must protect the order of the world comes finally to trust its undefended benevolence. And in the light of this estimate of Mr. Gladstone's entirely moral certainty, his direct ethical movement, must all the other matters left to be explained by time be expected to unfold their significance.

Gordon's doom had a dramatic setting, a black background, a foreground of fire, over which swept with the sand of the desert the weird forms of pain and superstition, breaking at last upon the unmoved front of Fatalism. The fanaticism of the Orient and the West were trying out the issue between them. It is not to be expected that there could be a clairvoyance in Mr. Gladstone's Cabinet which could match either in movement or subtlety these age-old forces which contended about the forge fires in which glowed the fate of Khartoum and the Upper Nile. Between London and the Gladstone Cabinet were stretched thousands of miles to the feet of the Sphinx, and thence other thousands of

FROM POET TO PREMIER

miles over which the veil of mystery hangs like an atmosphere breathed from the lips of the Sphinx. Lombard Street is not a street in Khartoum, nor Gordon a modern Englishman; orders issued in the Cabinet, discussed in the House, filtered through Egypt, criticized by Cromer, resolve themselves at last into a luminous haze in which at length men of soul blindly feel their way to accomplish what they can.

After all, heroism is not found alone in defending the impossible; it may equally well win its crown by enduring the inevitable; and passive virtues wait the recognition which energetic activity will accord when it has wearied itself over its exploits in vain. It is in this spirit that the biographer of the Great Premier says of the English Cabinet of the Gordon period: "We all must continue to suffer in silence. Gordon was a hero, and a hero of heroes; but we ought to have known that a hero of heroes is not a proper person to give effect at a distant point, and in most difficult circumstances, to the views of ordinary men. It was unfortunate that he should claim the

GLADSTONE

hero's privilege by turning upside down and inside out every idea and intention with which he left England, and for which he had obtained our approval. . . . The same consideration that is always so bounteously and so justly extended to the soldier in the field is no less due in its measure to the councillor in the Cabinet. This is a bit of equity often much neglected, both by contemporaries and by History."

This is the nearest approach to self-pity that Mr. Morley allows himself, and he only takes this tone because the honor of his Chief is impugned. He is quite right in defending from reproach the course of Mr. Gladstone in the Gordon dilemma, as that of the statesman whose conscience and chivalry were a chief asset in the public service.

This is a fragmentary review of a great career; the sixty years of Mr. Gladstone's public life were the vindication of convictions and the application of principles which were the possession of a private character of singular purity of motive and singleness of purpose. The Earl of Bea-

FROM POET TO PREMIER

consfield may have been more conciliatory of the Sovereign, but no lover of England could have proved more loyal to the Throne. One appears in history as a singularly interesting actor of unexpected dramas; the other an unwearied interpreter of all that is best in the national life of England. So consummate an idealist was Mr. Gladstone that he dared hold that what in private life was ethically right was in public life morally sound. The extension of its area did not dim the sharpness of its outline nor veil the beauty of that vision.

The exquisite poem of Stephen Phillips is a very exalted and beautiful tribute to the distinction of the Great Commoner's public service, charm of character, and invaluable worth to England and the world,—the rounded completeness of this man, so many times Premier of England.

*NOT taken, scythe in hand, from field half-reaped,
Not early stolen in thy wine of May;
Not lingering on to death through life eclipsed,
But fortunately old, in fragrant fame,
Thou from the Sun hast passed into the dark.*

GLADSTONE

*Warrior with deep unwillingness to wound,
Smiter that ne'er didst learn the art to stab,
Exquisite knight, so gentle to the end ;
Of chivalry antique and gracious words :
Foeman, with sweetness of an elder day.*

*Not in the press of war didst thou go down,
But seeing death was near, thou didst retire ;
Preparing as a runner for that course,
That final struggle, and that different field,
With pain preparing and with solemn care.*

*The saint and poet dwelt apart ; but thou
Wast holy in the furious press of men,
And choral in the central rush of life.
Yet didst thou love old branches and a book
And Roman verses on an English lawn.*

*Thy voice had all the roaring of the wave,
And hoarse magnificence of rushing stones ;
It had the murmur of Ionian bees,
And the persuading sweetness of a shower.
Clarion of God ! thy ringing peal is o'er !*

*Yet not for all thy breathing charm remote,
Nor breach tremendous in the force of Hell,
Not for these things we praise thee, though these things
Are much ; but more, because thou didst discern
In temporal policy the eternal will ;*

FROM POET TO PREMIER

*Thou gav'st to party strife the epic note,
And to debate the thunder of the Lord,
To meanest issues fire of the Most High.
Hence eyes that ne'er beheld thee now are dim,
And alien men on alien shores lament.*

THE END

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
305 De Neve Drive - Parking Lot 17 • Box 951388
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90095-1388

Return this material to the library from which it was borrowed.

OCT 07 2008

Form L

Handwritten mark



3 1158 00157 9886

CT
119
S627f

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



AA 001 216 526 2

